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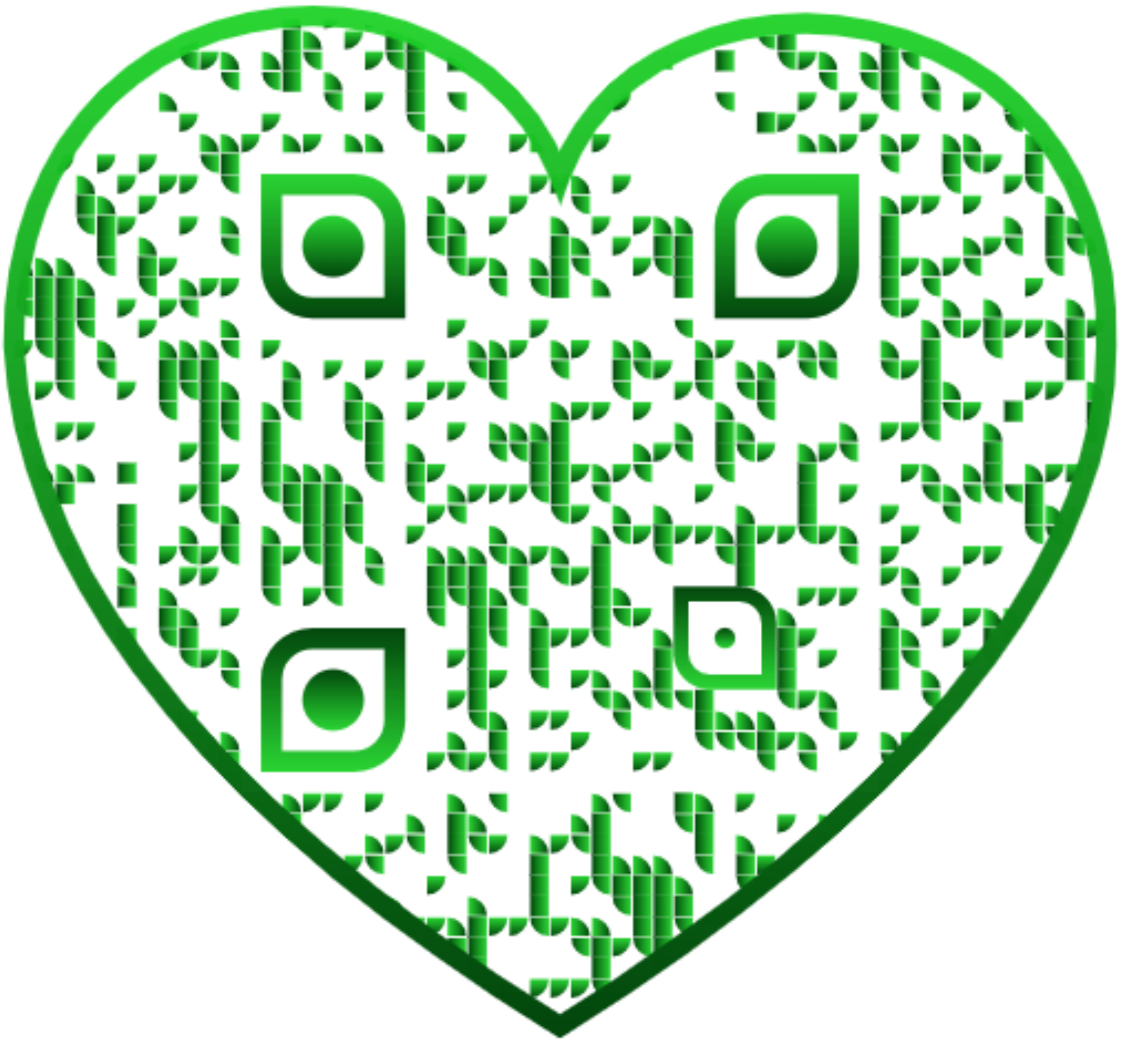

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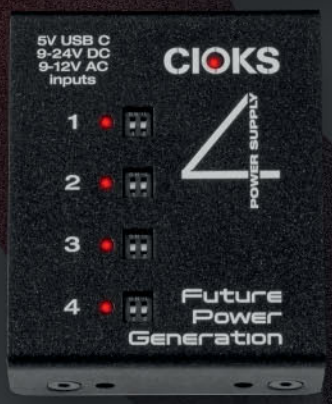

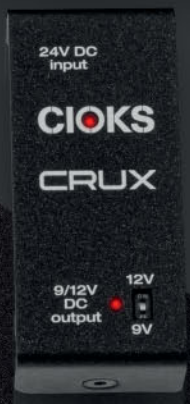

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OUR TRESPASS AND SYNERGY

SOMETIMES IT FEELS, even to me, that an issue of *Guitar Player* magazine is all over the place, musically speaking. I say "even to me" because I'm the one, after all, doing the programming. But I've never cared much for the idea of theme issues (even though we do them from time to time) or grouping artists on the basis of genre. Besides, I find it more interesting to discover the shared ideas, practices, techniques and attitudes among a group of performers of different eras, ages, styles, instruments and approaches. It can be kind of marvelous to see.

Consider Mark Knopfler, our cover artist, and the venerable bluesman Walter Trout. Although both are celebrated for their fretwork and tone, they make it clear in their interviews that, these days, their focus is first and foremost on the song. For Walter, the songwriting process is cathartic, as it was when he made his new album, *Broken*, after reflecting on the world's wars and divisions. "During the writing process for this album, I'd been watching the news," he says, "and I was getting myself into a certain frame of mind. And then — *boom* — [*the songs*] all came out."

As for Knopfler, having establishing himself as one of roots-rock's most expressive and melodic guitarists, he's now drawn to the solitary act of composing. "I see myself much more as a songwriter these days," Mark tells us, adding, "Just being a decent writer, that's all I want. All I'm hoping for is to get a good song written and get it recorded and see if I can make a good record out of it. After all this time, that's the most important thing."

I first noticed a synergy among this issue's guitarists while reading Gary Graff's "Five Songs" piece with Blue Öyster Cult's Buck Dharma, and Joe Bosso's "How I Wrote…" with Squeeze guitarist Glenn Tilbrook, each of whom explained how the Teac four-track recorder played a role in their writing process. Consider that common thread and you can begin to understand how transformational multitrack home recording was — not only to established songwriters like Dharma and Tilbrook but also to aspiring musicians everywhere — when it arrived in the 1970s.

But the connection that brought a smile to my face was Carrie Brownstein's and Trout's love for a pair of American guitars from what many consider an infamous era in U.S. guitar manufacturing: a 1973 Fender Strat for the bluesman, and a 1972 Gibson SG for the Sleater-Kinney guitarist. "Some people say that's when Gibson got pretty inconsistent," Carrie tells us. "I think that's true, but there are definitely Gibsons from that era that still sound great." Considering that my favorite guitar is my very fine Norlin-era 1974 Gibson ES-345, I must wholeheartedly concur.

And there are many other similar connections among the artists in this issue. As you read through it — and, moreover, as you go through life — look for the places where mutual interests intersect the soft boundaries of style, attitude, preference and taste. It will illuminate the world — and help you feel a whole lot better about it.

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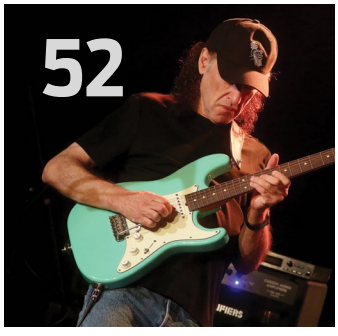

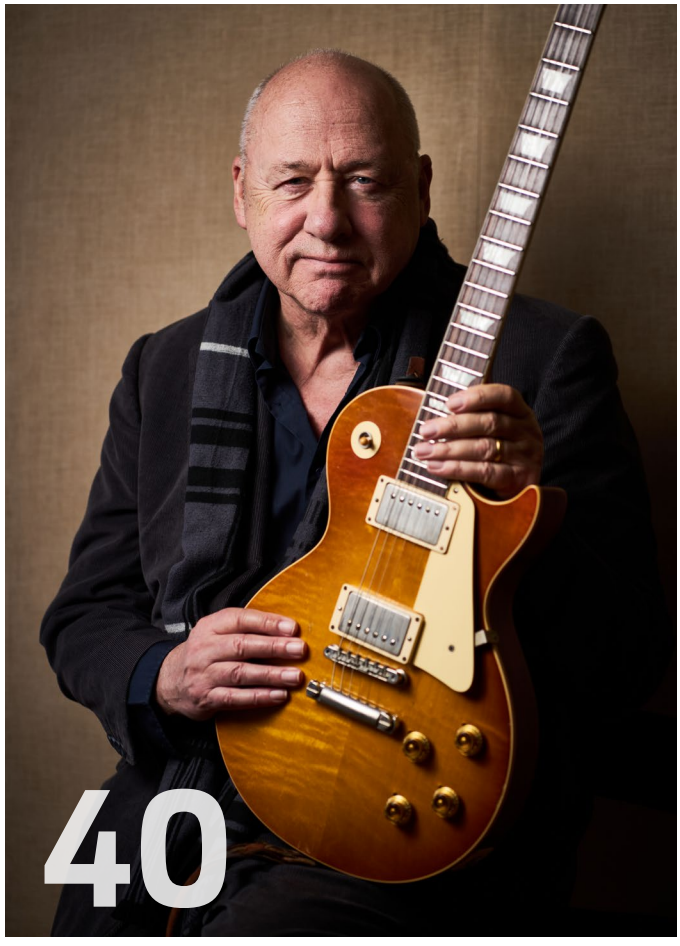

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The ToneLounge Shoreline 2TV (top) and TVL (bottom) have a Tele-inspired body shape with tweaks to the horn, waist and upper bout that make for an artful blending of old and new.

KUSTOM KULTURE

ToneLounge launches the **Shoreline TVL** and **2TV** with a nod to the past and an eye for the present.

BY DAVE HUNTER

WHEN YOU CONSIDER all the shapes and configurations of electric guitars that have hit the market since Leo Fender introduced the first mass-production solidbody 74 years ago, it seems quite a feat when a maker launches a new design that looks original, yet somehow fits right in. ToneLounge Guitars has managed to do just that with a fresh range of guitars from Brian Swerdfeger, a designer with a long history in the business.

Swerdfeger has spent decades in the deep end of the guitar pool, working for Taylor Guitars and most recently as head of R&D for Fender. He's seen the industry from myriad perspectives, and the experience has primed him well to design and build his own instruments. Given his résumé, we might be tempted to look for a little of all the above in the ToneLounge Shoreline TVL and Shoreline 2TV guitars seen here, and no doubt we'll find elements that draw both direct and indirect connections. And yet, the two Shoreline models cut a fresh figure in a crowded field, while they offer well-considered features.

The Shoreline's body shape and 25 ½–inch scale seem Telecaster-inspired, but there's a certain forward thrust to the profile, coupled with a slightly offset waist, a truncated horn and a reshaped upper bout that helps to make them undeniably different. It all seems to be an artful blending of old and new.

"That's a perfect description of what I set out to design and build," Swerdfeger replies. "It's very difficult, if not impossible, to make a new shape that is not referencing or tipping the hat to the classic designs that came before us. With the Shoreline, I wanted to honor my SoCal heritage and at the same time take us to new places. It's designed to inspire players and their music, and it's my hope that these guitars provide fresh identities and performance experiences you can call your own. 'Modern classic' sounds boastful and trite, but that's it in a nutshell."

Replying to further thoughts on that score, Swerdfeger adds, "My neck design is a great example of modern features with a vintage soul. It has a compound radius, stainless frets set in a pocketed fretboard — that is, with blind fret ends — rolled and aged fretboard edges, an oil-infused bone nut and a string tree that are all thoroughly modern. Yet the flat-sawn maple neck back, classic slab rosewood fretboard and single-acting truss rod are vintage through and through. And I prefer the tone and resonance of a classic woodscrew bolt-on neck, too."

The superb feel of these necks in the hand reinforces the effort entirely. They seem familiar, certainly, but also speak of a very conscious perfecting of the many little details that come together to make a difference. Fret work is immaculate, fingerboard edges are invitingly radiused, and ToneLounge's so-called comfortable modern-C neck profile and compound 10-to-14–inch fingerboard radius sit easily in the hand. Playing comfort is further enhanced by generous body contours at the ribcage and forearm positions, resulting in less "Tele scarring" than a certain other classic can induce, while the body side of the neck joint is also sculpted for easier upper-fret access.

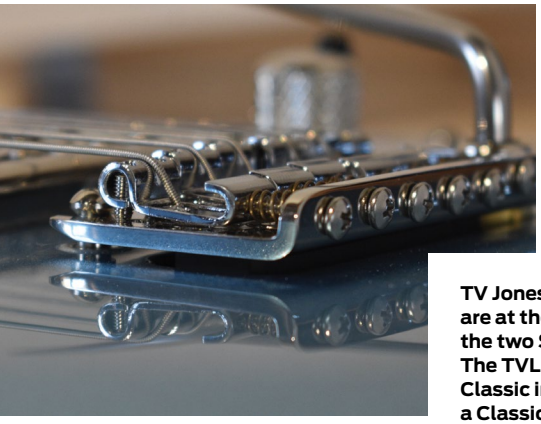
The guitars are built in Nashville by ToneLounge's two-man team, which includes Swerdfeger and David Graef, an acclaimed tech who has worked with Don Felder, Rascal Flatts, Mark Knopfler, Peter Frampton, Foo Fighters and others. The spec sheets accompanying each of the review models credit Swerdfeger as master builder and Graef with performing the wiring and final setup.

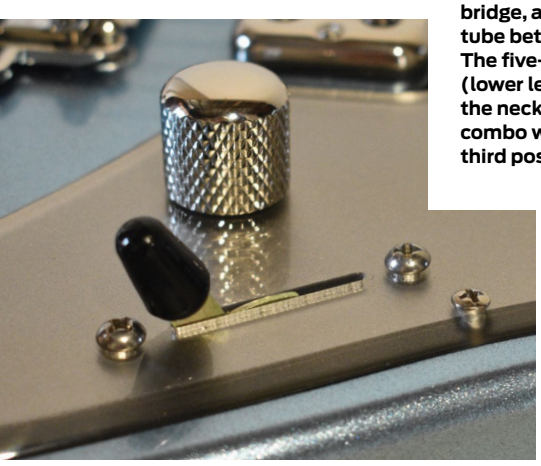
"I WANTED TO HONOR MY SO-CAL HERITAGE AND AT THE SAME TIME TAKE US TO NEW PLACES"

Indeed, the playability is immediately impressive and makes me feel at home with each guitar before I even have a chance to think about it.

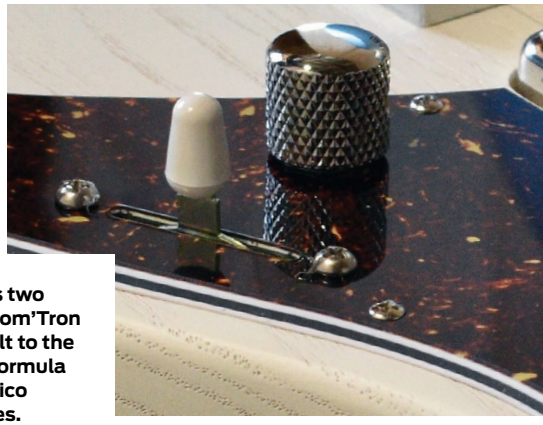
Swerdfeger notes that finishing is done out of house, and the results are equally notable. Each guitar displays some variety, too. The alder-bodied TVL boasts a mirror-like gloss atop its Ice Blue Metallic finish, while the 2TV's swamp-ash body — though also shot in nitrocellulose lacquer — displays a white, open-pore satin that allows a more tactile feel of the grain.

Alongside the Gotoh hardware, which comprises a hardtail bridge on the 2TV and a two-post vibrato on the TVL, these Shoreline models display a distinct fondness for TV Jones pickups. The former has a pair of the maker's Zoom'Tron pickups, built to the general Filter'Tron formula but with alnico magnet poles, while the latter sports a





TV Jones pickups are at the heart of the two Shorelines. The TVL sports a Classic in the neck, a Classic+ in the bridge, and a lipstick tube between them. The five-way switch (lower left) selects the neck-and-bridge combo when in the third position.



The 2TV has two TV Jones Zoom'Tron pickups, built to the Filter'Tron formula but with alnico magnet poles. "TV Jones pickups fit really well in a mix and band setting," Swerdfeger says, "without taking up too much sonic space."

TV Jones Classic in the neck, a Classic+ in the bridge, and a lipstick tube between them to offer S-inspired in-between settings. Although they do follow the latter-day La Cabronita craze, with the Gretsch-style pickups applied to otherwise bolt-neck, single-cutaway guitars, the choice takes the Shorelines further away from the F-inspired template to induce originality in the tone of each.

"[*TV Jones founder*] Tom Jones has been a friend for many, many years, and I love how he's expanded and evolved the classic Filter'Tron design," Swerdfeger tells me. "I love 'Trons and his variations because, when used in a new guitar design, like mine, they sound amazing and deliver tones that the classic guitars don't offer. Musically, TV Jones pickups fit really well in a mix and band setting, both clean and dirty, without taking up too much sonic space. This allows my guitars to play well with others. I also love that he is a small, family business like ours and his pickups are 100 percent made in America."

Tested through a 65amps London head and 2x12 cab, a custom tweed Deluxe-style 1x12 combo and a Fractal FM9 modeler, the 2TV and TVL both acquitted themselves beautifully and quickly established their prowess as the products of another pro-grade boutique guitar maker. In addition to easy playability, the Shorelines exhibit a tonal veracity. As the format probably implies, they take easily to a broad range of genres, excelling at everything from meaty twang to textural and atmospheric swirl and chimey indie rock. Even with heavier gain applied, each guitar remained clear and articulate, certainly leaning more toward Gretsch-meets-Fender than humbucker thick, but with plenty of body from all positions.

The Zoom'Trons, a relatively new model of pickup for TV Jones, were a fun surprise here, lending an alnico-pole clarity and shimmer that paired well with the 2TL's swamp-ash body. The result seemed a slightly increased glassy-to-gritty ratio when compared to the alder TVL with steel-pole Classics. The two-point vibrato on that guitar is smooth and efficient, with good return-to-pitch capabilities. It also contributes the slightly brighter, metallic edge of an S-inspired vibrato bridge, although the pickups on the 2TL again jump into the fray to help keep it all from being too spiky.

I'm not sure the lipstick pickup in the middle position of the TVL does much for me, but I've never found as much use for those Strat-inspired in-between settings as many other players have. It does its job though, and arguably provides as subtle a means of getting there as possible. Plus, Graef and Swerdfeger have cleverly wired the five-way switch on this one to give us the neck-and-bridge combo in the third position, so we're not missing out on that pleasure. As these two models demonstrate, ToneLounge makes cool guitars with a trick or two up their sleeves. I think we'll see many more great models from this stable.

CONTACT tonelounge.com
PRICES TVL, $3,800; 2TV, $3,200

EYE ON THE PRIZE

Erstwhile blues-rocker **Hannah Wicklund** finds her true self with an album of songs she calls "the most authentic I've ever written."

BY ANDREW DALY

LISTENING TO HANNAH Wicklund's music, you can tell she's been on the edge. That's nothing new though, as 2018's *Hannah Wicklund and the Steppin Stones* was a buffet of blues-rock songsmithery defined by mega-sounding guitars.

We knew Wicklund could rock, and it was evident that her voice could match even the highest registers that her cache of Tom Anderson guitars could conjure. But we didn't know that in the five years since that album's release, Wicklund was subconsciously hell-bent on becoming a version of herself that would be remembered as halcyon.

If that sounds lofty or weighty, fair enough. But listening to Wicklund's latest, *The Prize* (Strawberry Moon Records), there's no denying the radiance that blooms throughout it. Wicklund apparently would agree. "There are songs on here that are the most authentic I've ever written," she tells us. "The title track is the deepest piece of music I've done. It wasn't intentional, and I didn't set out to do that. But it's an example of the beauty of this album, as it's me dealing with issues like being transient, being back in my childhood room at my parents, and expressing who I was becoming."

Who Wicklund has become is of note, as *The Prize*'s 10 tracks run the gamut of emotion via guitar and piano. Laying her soul bare was one thing, but to get it all on tape in a serious yet whimsical way took some help from Greta Van Fleet bassist Sam Kiszka. "Sam helped this record be less high stress," she says. "He came from a different world, and that let us experiment and breathe rather than just hammer things out like in the past.

"That was important for me to experience, and it's reflected in the record. I can't tell you how often we laughed while trying new things that seemed weird or off the wall but nevertheless worked. I laughed so hard making *The Prize*, it was ridiculous, but I'm so proud of the tones we found. A lot of that was Sam's editing and trusting him enough to follow his lead. It was a lovely dynamic."

Kiszka aside, Wicklund is standing on her own two feet with *The Prize*. Her aura shines through, revealing an artist prepared to climb the music ladder on her terms. "I'm singing about strong feminine things," she says. "If I'd grown up seeing women wearing a dress onstage with a guitar, I might have been more comfortable with it, but I didn't.

"So a big part of this record is about expressing and embracing my girliness. I'm finally comfortable with all my natural feminine aspects, which led me to embrace all I love unabashedly. I didn't think I'd ever be able to, but I'm trying to give girls who love rock and roll a record that makes them feel good, but also makes me feel good. I'm proud and excited because I feel like I've done that. I can't wait to get out and share this."

What was your internal mission statement going into *The Prize*?

I'm not sure I had one. I've always sat down

ALIEGH SHEILDS

and let whatever song be what it is. When I was writing this record, it became an eagle-eyed view of my transition from girlhood to womanhood.

Specifically how so?
A lot of this was about embracing my femininity for the first time. Lyrically, many of the songs, maybe unintentionally, speak to my struggles as a woman. Femininity in rock and roll isn't always something you find. If you're a woman, being tough has meant being like Joan Jett.

As a 20-something woman, I was in this interesting place, going through difficult stuff regarding emerging womanhood. There have been tough breakups and hard things in business, and this album is like a time capsule of a certain period in my life where I was processing big stuff.

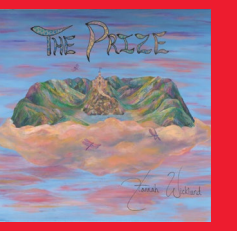
I picked up a lot of "light and shade" in the loud/quiet guitar dynamics. It seems like that was representative of what you were dealing with.
Yeah, I wanted to cover the full spectrum of emotion with my songwriting. I like it when an album takes you on a journey. Each song is different, and I want a lot of juxtapositions and, like you said, a lot of light and shade. So I'd have quiet moments, then go into a scream, and then a whisper, and I'd do that with the guitars, too. That represents life, and I want my music to reflect the loud and quiet moments.

Many people were probably expecting a straight-up blues record, but there's a lot of piano and additional instrumentation on *The Prize*.
Thank you. The piano was my first instrument, which I started on when I was three. I went through a crash course in Beatles songs and then got into classical music and compositions when I was seven. After that, I picked up guitar and almost abandoned piano, even though I was a good young player. So with this record, I came full circle there and wanted to have a lot of piano after not really playing for years.

There's plenty of guitars, too. Surely, you won't be leaving that behind.
Oh, no, I won't be. I love my guitars, and I love my power trio. I've been doing that forever.

The final three tracks — "Intervention," "Dark Passenger" and "Sun to Sun" — are a full-on sonic assault, as far as guitars go.
Those are the most guitar-forward tracks on the record. On "Intervention," I was going for an almost country-meets-blues-rock vibe, and I mainly used my pink Tom Anderson Raven, which Sam gifted to me while writing this record. I had mentioned in passing that I was ready for a pink guitar, which I was averse to in the past out of fear of being labeled a "girl with a guitar." That guitar is part of the beauty of embracing the ability to be a woman who wears a dress, loves girly things and can rip a guitar solo. The Raven is all over the record — pretty much every lead was done with it. But I am compelled to believe that Sam's Gibson SG, which is a Murphy Lab model based on a '61 or '62, also made it onto the record.

What amps and pedals did you use?
Many of the guitar sounds on this record came straight from the amp. As far as guitars go, this record was different because I wasn't really playing through much of my gear. In the past, I've had a whole 'board in the studio, and I used Orange [*Rocker 30*] amps a lot. My Orange is a great live amp, but it wasn't doing it in the studio, so I went with a Fender Princeton Reverb, which came about because I had access to a lot of Sam and Jake [*Kiszka*]'s Greta Van Fleet rig.



RECOMMENDED LISTENING

The Prize
"The Prize," "Songbird Sing," "Intervention," "Dark Passenger," "Sun to Sun"

"I'M TRYING TO GIVE GIRLS WHO LOVE ROCK AND ROLL A RECORD THAT MAKES THEM FEEL GOOD BUT ALSO MAKES ME FEEL GOOD"

How integral was Sam to the end product?
He was very important. Sam and I met in the studio on this record. We'd had the same management for a long time, and the idea was to get us in the studio and see how we vibed. I also needed a bassist, and he was a huge help there. But it was clear right away that it would be enjoyable. The energy was jovial, and Sam helped bring the biggest thing missing from my recording experiences: fun.

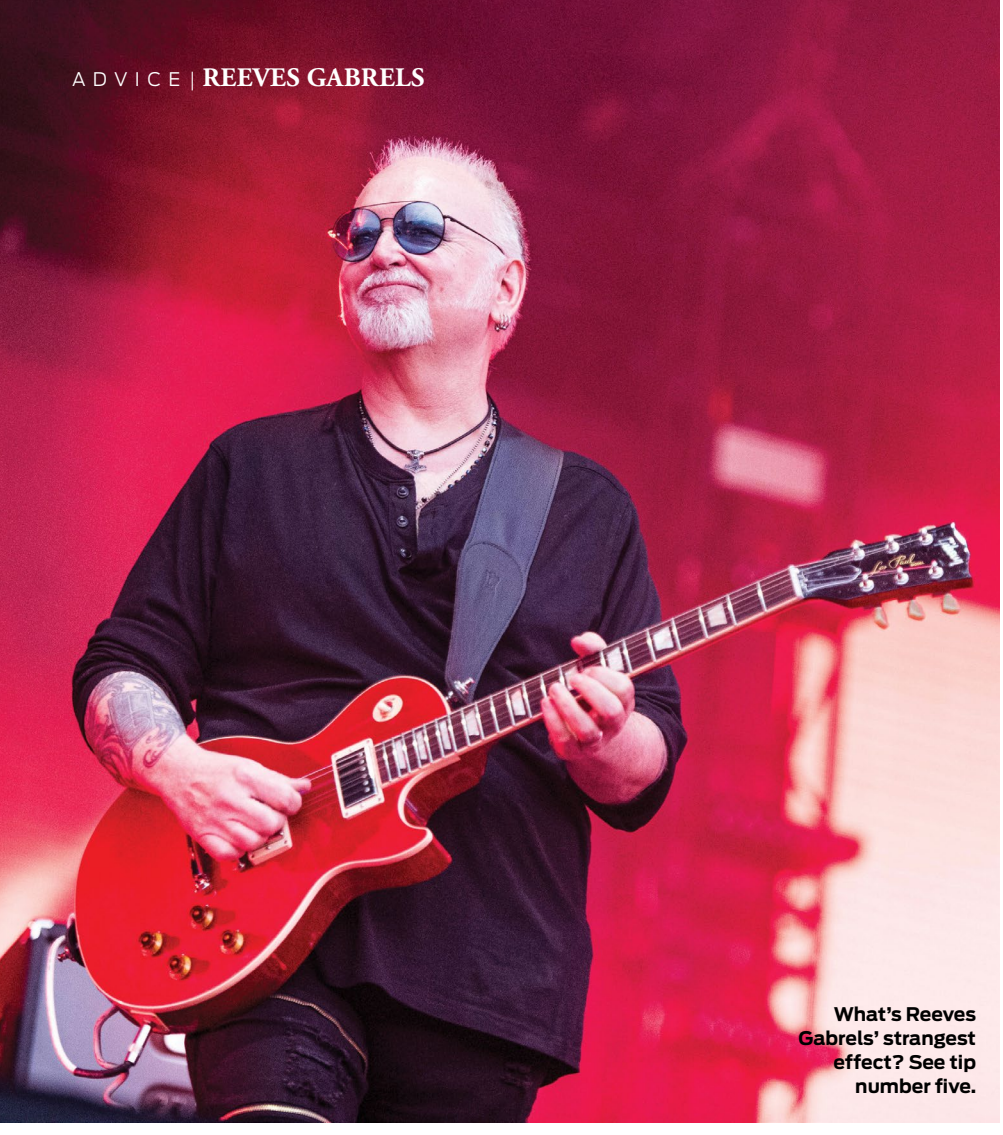
Clearly, *The Prize* is mostly defined by growth, both musically and personally.
It means the absolute world to me, because it's the full-circle moment I needed to step into womanhood. I feel like I've become who I'm supposed to be. And you're right — there's been massive growth for me personally and musically. From recording to releasing to playing, my life path was carved out with this record.

I didn't intentionally write a record for women who love rock, but in hindsight, I realized that I only had a few strong female influences growing up with music, like Stevie Nicks, Janis Joplin and Joni Mitchell. Rock music is always so masculine, and there's a lot of misogyny, sexualization and objectifying of women. I know that sex, drugs, and rock and roll are how it is, and I love rock and roll, but there is something about being a woman who sings those songs and not really understanding that stuff as a kid that makes you think.

But I'm not a little girl anymore; I'm a grown woman singing those songs, and I realize that a woman's work is never done. I feel like I've reached a plane of musical existence about female empowerment in rock. I never set out to do that, but it's how it's turned out because it's what I need for myself.

Hannah Wicklund holds her pink Tom Anderson Raven.

JAMIE GOODSELL



What's Reeves Gabrels' strangest effect? See tip number five.

TIP SHEET

Think effects are a crutch? **Reeves Gabrels** has a few choice words (and good advice) for you.

BY JOE BOSSO

"DON'T GET MARRIED to your effects." "Effects are no substitute for playing well." Over the years, guitarists have made these and similar comments in music magazines (even in the pages of *Guitar Player*). For his part, Reeves Gabrels is having none of it.

"Effects sometimes get a bad rap, and I don't know why," he says. "Effects can be marvelous tools to express yourself, but you have to use them creatively. I think the problem comes when guitarists don't apply them with a sense of imagination. Copycat-ism is the real issue, and who wants to be a copycat?"

Thus far, nobody has had the nerve to suggest to his face that he relies too much on effects, but if such a scenario occurred, Gabrels imagines he would handle the situation in one of two ways: "If it was somebody I liked," he replies, "I would say, 'I think you're wrong, but why don't you watch the show tonight and tell me what you think?' And if it was somebody I didn't like, I'd say, "Well, then you must be a fucking idiot.'"

1 YOUR GUITAR AND AMP ARE ONE INSTRUMENT

"People tend to spend a lot of time playing their electric guitars unplugged. I do it, too, but the fact is a guitar is designed to be put through an amplifier. Anytime you're playing it unplugged, it's calling out for its better half. It comes down to this: If you choose to play the electric guitar, play the electric guitar.

"There are practical reasons for this. How many times have you practiced something on an unplugged electric guitar, and the minute you plug in, it feels like everything is different? Until you're plugged in, you don't really know how the pickups will change the sound or what the amp's speaker is going to do, how the notes will bloom and sustain. You might think you know how your pinch harmonics will sound, but you never really know until you run your guitar through an amp. Your electric guitar sound is something you should try to be familiar with."

2 LOOK FOR EFFECTS OR SOUND PROCESSORS NOT MADE FOR THE GUITAR

"I remember when the Korg Kaoss Pad came out in 1999. I had heard about it being marketed to DJs, and one day I read a review of it in one of the recording magazines. It said something like, 'It's really great. You can manipulate sounds and mix effects in real time. You can do all these things, and oh yeah — it has no application for guitar or bass.'

"I said to myself, We'll see about that! I went to 48th Street and bought a unit, and I immediately fell in love with it. I even used it at a gig that night. How wrong that reviewer was. I got a mic stand and built a little platform on it so I could put the Kaoss Pad right in front of me. It works on an X/Y axis, so you can move your finger across it and mix two different effects in different ways. You can make it sound like tape speeding up. It has random access, so it's off when you're not touching it.

"I figured out all kinds of things to do with the Kaoss Pad. It was so cool. That made me start to seek out more effects that were marketed for DJs and keyboard players. For a while, Alesis made these things called the Air Synth and the Air FX, and you could manipulate the sound by moving your hand around — there were no knobs. I had them both on my mic stand. With the Air FX I could do a 'record slowdown' thing, almost like a Whammy Pedal. They were in my guitar effects loop, and they worked great. Other people used them in the studio, but I used them live."

3 REALLY GET TO KNOW YOUR EFFECTS

"Just like you need to practice your guitar and

ALESSANDRO BOSIO /ALAMY

Gabrels with his rig in 1997. Learn what pedals designed for instruments other than guitar can do for you. See tip two.

get to know everything about it, you should do the same with your effects. People tend to latch onto one or two things an effects pedal will do, and they use them for those things without exhausting everything they can do. The more you practice with an effect, the more it will become a musical instrument and less what a lot of people might dismiss as 'noise.'

"Some effects pedals will surprise you. I remember, years ago, I bought a Univox Unitron pedal — it was like the poor-man's Mu-Tron. When it was in bypass, it still went through a gain stage, so you could never get away from it. That disappointed me, but I used it in jams and I found a way to deal with the gain stage that I didn't want but still use the pedal. Over time, I discovered that if I changed the settings to something that didn't make any sense visually, it would do some really cool shit. I would hit a chord and nothing would come out of the amp at first, but then the sound would come out from the highest regions of space — the highest frequency of the chord and then slowly it would reveal the full chord in all its weird, distorted glory. That was so cool.

"I think my playing had to catch up to what the pedal could do, but the point is, I never would have discovered that if I didn't stay with it and discover what it was really capable of."

4 A RANT: EFFECTS AREN'T EXPRESSIVE ENOUGH. AND WHERE ARE THE INNOVATIONS?

"PEOPLE NEED TO TAKE MORE CHANCES. LOOK HOW ENO RAN FRIPP'S GUITAR THROUGH THE FILTER SECTION OF A SYNTHESIZER"

"I'm going to disrupt the tips to vent for a few minutes. This is something I've said for years, actually, and it's still the case: Effects are not interactive enough at this point in time, or at least I've not found them to be expressive enough. You turn an effect on or you turn it off. Even something as simple as a foot pedal to mix the effect in, it's still a big deal. I'm talking about the commercially available stuff here.

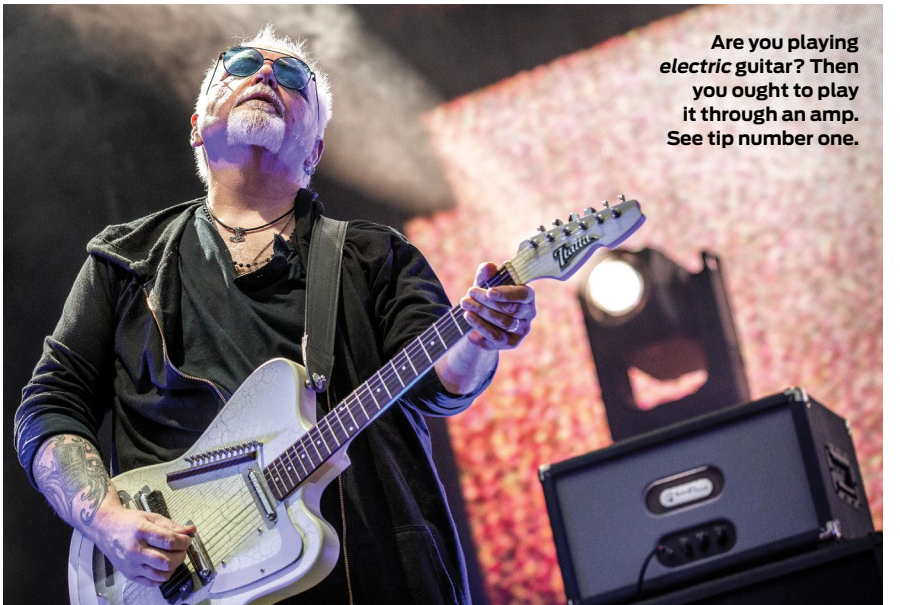
"I would like to have the option of, say, plugging one or two volume pedals in and assigning them to any parameter I want per patch. That would be a simple one. I guess I could have a MIDI jack coming out of my skull, but we're a long way from that. Well, maybe not. Whenever a new pedal comes out, it's the same old shit and the same stuff we've already heard. The sense of adventure and discovery isn't there. Maybe it's because I'm old and jaded, but on the other hand, I've been feeling like this for a long time.

"People need to take more chances. Look how Eno ran Fripp's guitar through the filter section of a synthesizer. Or the way Tony Visconti put drums through a harmonizer — that's what I'm talking about."

5 ANYTHING CAN BE AN EFFECT... IF YOU DON'T MIND LOOKING SILLY

"When I was in Tin Machine, I wanted a certain texture that wouldn't sound like a guitar or a synth. I got the idea: What if I had something with a variable speed motor, like a Dremel? I mentioned it to my guitar tech, and he said, 'Ohhhh.. You want a vibrator.'

"He went out and got one, and I tried using it with a Harmonizer. I discovered that if I put the vibrator back at the bridge, right where the string is, it would produce a sound like a slightly slowed-down violin or cello bow. By the way, in this case, size matters because you need a vibrator small enough to hold in your hand. I also found that the further down I moved the vibrator on the string, it would create a pitch. I practiced with it and learned a bunch of things I could do with it. Anything can be a guitar effect if you're inventive enough and don't mind looking silly."



Are you playing *electric* guitar? Then you ought to play it through an amp. See tip number one.

GONZALES PHOTO/ALAMY; MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES (1997)

KLOS UP

Klos co-founders Adam and Ian Klosowiak are all in on creating an array of carbon-fiber instruments fit for an adventurous lifestyle.

BY JIMMY LESLIE

THE CARBON-FIBER REVOLUTION may not be televised, but it's all over the internet and here in the pages of *GP*. The young Klosowiak brothers bring a unique perspective, focused on intelligent builds using modern materials in traditional forms. They make sonorous and highly playable carbon instruments at lower prices than other custom manufacturers, and market them to adventure lifestylists, who benefit most from the resulting durability. Their ads feature Klos guitars on the backs of hikers and sailors, and hilarious online videos show players using their wares as golf clubs and baseball bats.

A successful Kickstarter campaign for the Travel Guitar put Klos (pronounced like the opposite of "far") on the map in 2015. The 33-inch miniature dreadnought remains the company's flagship, but Klos has expanded the line significantly and now offers a fleet of acoustic and electric instruments in an array of sizes up to the full-scale Grand Cutaway. Last month, their three-quarter-sized Grand Cutaway Mini acoustic-electric earned an Editors' Pick Review for being travel-friendly and gig-worthy. Klos is currently introducing an A-style mandolin, a nylon-string and a 12-string with a particularly cool tuning-peg design on its headstock to go along with a full line of basses and ukuleles. The company offers lots of custom options for each. The Hybrid Series combines wood and carbon and is more affordable, while Carbon Timber is an intriguing newfangled material that doesn't contain any wood but has its straight grain appearance rather than the traditional carbon-fiber weave.

I caught up with Klos at the NAMM show and was impressed with the consistency in craftsmanship across its expanding range of instruments. With so much goodness coming down the mountain from Provo, Utah, it's high time we met the brothers behind the brand.

What was the big bang that brought Klos Guitars into the universe?

Ian Klosowiak I was studying mechanical engineering at Brigham Young University and built a carbon-fiber guitar for a class. It was a lifelong goal to build a guitar of my own. During the process I did a ton of research and recognized that there was no company making carbon-fiber guitars at a reasonable price in a high-end, yet practical way.

Adam Klosowiak Soon after, I was visiting Ian when he asked if I knew anything about business competitions. I had won a hackathon at Princeton the year before, where I studied electrical engineering.

Brothers Ian (left) and Adam Klosowiak launched Klos after becoming frustrated with wear and tear on their wooden acoustic guitars.

Klos has expanded its guitar line with the 12-string (left) and the full-scale Grand Cutaway models (right), in addition to the Travel Guitar and the Grand Cutaway Mini we reviewed in our May 2024 issue.

Ian Adam was involved with entrepreneurship, so we decided to put our heads together and start a company making a new category of guitars that you can depend on.

Were you inspired by any brands or models?

Ian I was inspired by a bunch of guitars, but being an avid mountain biker, the main inspiration came from the mountain bike industry. I credit my knack for working with tools and being detail oriented, as well as my experience as a bike mechanic. Over the past two decades, carbon fiber has become increasingly popular for making mountain bikes. I believe the same thing will happen with guitars, because there are so many advantages over wood.

What got you hooked on carbon fiber in the first place?

Ian My first exposure to making carbon-fiber parts was during an internship in a carbon-fiber lab at Northwestern University. After learning the basics, I successfully fixed a couple of carbon-fiber bike frames, and I made a bunch of random things for fun. I got familiar with Rainsong's highly coveted carbon guitars, but they're expensive and out of range for a college student. Living in Utah and Colorado, naturally I did a lot of camping, rock climbing, skiing and mountain biking, and I brought my guitar everywhere. Seeing my wood guitar get beat up from all the travel, I started obsessing about owning a carbon-fiber guitar one day. At the same time, while Adam was a student at Princeton, his guitar developed a crack in the soundboard simply from sitting next to an open window. Since both of us were experiencing the same pain points, we knew there was an opportunity with carbon-fiber guitars.

Durability is a primary advantage, but are there sonic advantages as well?

Adam People have created stereotypes about carbon fiber and make a lot of assumptions about its sound. Like wood, carbon fiber can be designed and modified to have a wide range of sonic properties. We can make guitars that sound bright, and some have very deep bass, but in general we always aim to have a balanced tone.

"THE WORST THING IS WHEN YOU GO ON A TRIP AND DON'T HAVE A GUITAR ON HAND"

The Klos Travel Guitar was its first — and remains its most popular — instrument. "We made only Travel Guitars for the first three years, so that product line had a head start," Adam explains.

Aside from good sound, our instruments have excellent playability, which is something we pride ourselves on. We spend hours and hours on each instrument, making sure it does not leave our shop until we're confident the customer will find the playability to be the best they've ever experienced.

Most carbon-fiber makers go with an offset soundhole, yet yours is traditional, and you offer a side sound port as a custom option.

Adam Nice observation. We try to innovate on top of tradition, and because our material is already very innovative, we try to keep other elements of the instruments traditional whenever possible. We therefore have traditional soundholes, but we do offer side sound ports for players who want it. A side sound port on an acoustic instrument works like a monitor for the player and makes an instrument sound much louder for the person playing.

Ian Our most popular customization is the choice of pickup. You can achieve a specific sound by choosing the pickup you know and love, such as the Baggs and Fishman pickups we offer for acoustics. Or we can do a custom install of whatever you send us. We also offer the HyVibe smart guitar preamp. For electric and bass guitar, we have a unique pickguard that can pretty much handle any pickups, with any type of knob configuration. Our pickguards are fully loaded, so if you ever want a new pickup or layout, it's not a problem.

What's the deal with Carbon Timber?

Adam Carbon Timber is incredible. The material is nickel-coated carbon fiber, so the carbon strands have nickel atoms coated on top of them. The result is a material that is as incredibly durable as black carbon fiber but has a brown, metallic wood-like appearance. The Carbon Timber strands are laid in one direction, and the resulting grain makes each instrument unique. We're very excited about it and have seen a huge positive response from customers thus far.

What makes the Travel Guitar the most popular and lauded of your instruments?

Adam Carbon fiber's durability makes it a perfect fit because travel guitars undergo the most stress. We made only Travel Guitars for

The Klos A-style mandolin. With regard to the instrument's extreme string tension, "nobody questions the logic of using carbon fiber," Adam says.

the first three years, so that product line had a head start. It has substantially more reviews, and although it is our best seller, I wouldn't say it's our best guitar. The Grand Cutaway is our biggest guitar, so it has the best sound while having the same benefits as our other instruments.

What fuels your ambition to create an expansive line?

Adam We always had a vision of becoming the carbon-fiber instrument company. After making our first few instruments, we learned that we had developed the capability to make practically anything out of carbon, and that capability was our most valuable asset.

So in 2023 we decided that we would launch eight more instruments based on the top requests from prospective customers. We did that and have plans for seven more in 2024. We're releasing an A-style mandolin, a 12-string guitar, a classical guitar with or without a cutaway, as well as neck replacements for Fender basses in three sizes — four-, five- and six-string — plus a baritone electric guitar. After that we'll slow down a bit on new instrument launches and focus on growing the existing product lines.

What are you most excited about?

Adam We're extremely excited for the mandolin. The response from the mandolin community has been incredible. Everyone has been so positive, and honestly, nobody questions the logic of using carbon fiber. Everyone just gets it. A mandolin has eight steel strings, so it has a huge amount of tension on the soundboard, making it hard to make a good-sounding wooden one that won't break simply from passive string tension.

"The response from the mandolin community has been incredible," Adam says of the Klos A-style, seen here in Carbon Timber.

What are some company goals and individual thoughts you both have as Klos moves forward with these new instruments?

Adam More than anything, we want to keep spreading the word. We know that we're still a tiny brand compared to the big guys, but we also know that many players want a unique instrument from a smaller company that pays close attention to each customer. We're continuing to reach out to good retail stores and to keep finding good partners who are interested in selling innovative gear that their customers want sold locally.

Ian Passionate guitarists always wish they had more time to play and practice. The worst thing is when you go on a trip and don't have a guitar on hand to fill in your spare time. I always had the mentality that my guitar is made to be used, and not babied. I was the guy who would put my guitar in a couple layers of garbage bags and shove it in the front of my kayak.

That attitude is at the core of our vision, to make guitars that are treated more like a piece of gear than a piece of fine art, or delicate furniture at grandma's house. Once a guitarist gets a Klos guitar and embraces this same vision, it changes your relationship with your guitar. It will never sit in its case. It will always be leaning against your couch, ready to be played.

Buck Dharma performs with Blue Öyster Cult at at Union Scene in Drammen, Norway, February 8, 2016.

MY CAREER IN FIVE SONGS

"More cowbell!" **Buck Dharma** reveals the origins of "(Don't Fear) The Reaper" and four other Blue Öyster Cult classics.

BY GARY GRAFF

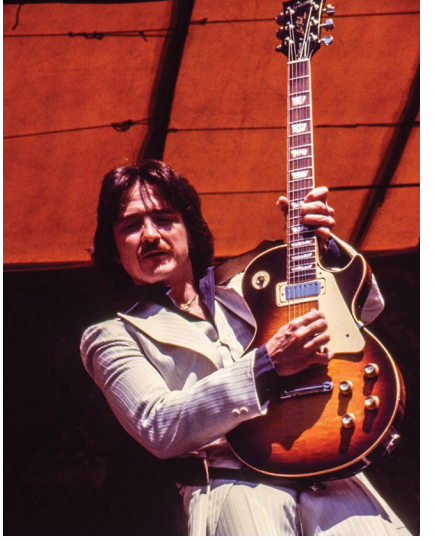
GUITAR WAS A "third time's the charm" proposition for Blue Öyster Cult co-founder Donald "Buck Dharma" Roeser. The Queens, New York, native started out playing accordion when he was nine years old before switching to drums a year later "when I realized the accordion wasn't hip," he says. That lasted for a few years until he broke his wrist playing basketball. "When I got my cast on," Roeser recalls, "my brother had gotten a Stella acoustic guitar for Christmas, and I started playing that. I was a junior in high school and knew a drummer who was better than me, so I started playing lead guitar, teaching myself by ear. I never looked back."

For 57 years — since Blue Öyster Cult's origins as Soft White Underbelly in 1967 — Roeser has played lead guitar for BOC and served as one of its chief songwriters and occasional lead vocalist. He laughs as he describes the band's longevity — "unexpected" is his word of choice — but the band has a body of 14 studio albums and a clutch of songs that remain classic-rock standards. The group also earned some pop-culture fame when it was immortalized in *Saturday Night Live*'s "More Cowbell" sketch during the show's April 8, 2000, broadcast.

"What we've had to offer throughout the ride was the point of view of the participants," Roeser says. That includes the five original members — Roeser, co-guitarist Eric Bloom, keyboardist Allen Lanier, bassist Joe Bouchard and his brother, drummer Albert — as well as producer Sandy Pearlman and Richard Meltzer, both of whom served as the group's main lyricists. "So what you got was an amalgam of that mixture," he continues, "and over the years we've always pretty much just been ourselves. 'Cause any time we were conscious of fashion or trends, I think it was to our detriment. We've always done best just doing what we do."

That encompasses a wide range of styles. Over a nearly six-decade career, Blue Öyster Cult have blended clever intellectualism with sophisticated humor, shredding as a multi-guitar monster (late co-founder Lanier also played rhythm and lead) while maintaining a strong melodic discipline. The group could rock out with "Cities on Flame With Rock and Roll"

GONZALES PHOTO/ALAMY



Dharma plays a Les Paul onstage at Oakland Stadium, September 2, 1978

or "Hot Rails to Hell," then deliver the sweet sentimentality of "Burnin' for You" or the buoyant pop of "Goin' Through the Motions," a 1977 single co-written with Ian Hunter. Patti Smith, Lanier's onetime girlfriend, even brought some cutting-edge poetic cachet with her contributions to songs such as "Career of Evil" and "The Revenge of Vera Gemini." "We had a few band houses where we'd practice, and we worked hard at it," Roeser says. "We spent a lot of time doing it, because we had our eyes on the ball."

Roeser and Bloom are back on the road this year with the latest incarnation of BOC, while the former has been working on a new solo track called "The End of Every Song" that he plans to release this year. There's "new" BOC material as well in the form of *Ghost Stories*, a 12-track set drawn from vintage archival recordings, mostly by the original lineup, kept by the band's longtime live sound engineer George Geranios. Current band member Richie Castellano (keyboard, guitars and vocals) and producer Steve Schenck deployed a variety of technologies to make them release-worthy, while Albert and Joe Bouchard recorded new parts on some tracks. Among the highlights are BOC's only known recorded performance of the MC5's "Kick Out the Jams" and a 2016 cover of the Beatles' "If I Fell."

"It sounds like a long-lost BOC record," Roeser contends. "It's almost eerie to me to hear the Bouchard brothers back in the band and Allen Lanier still alive. Of course I remember the songs from the day, but they sound like new tracks to me."

And as long as he's looking back at those *Ghost Stories*, we thought it was a good time for Roeser to dig into some of the more celebrated memories from Blue Öyster Cult's past.

"CITIES ON FLAME WITH ROCK AND ROLL"
BLUE ÖYSTER CULT (1972)

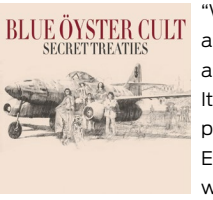
"'Cities on Flame' is a Sandy Pearlman lyric. Albert Bouchard began the writing process; he was heavily, heavily influenced by Black Sabbath's 'The Wizard' and turned that phrase around and made it dip the other way. And I wrote the second part of that riff, so that's how we did that. The chorus and the rest of the arrangement we would just hash out and play until we were all happy with the way it sounded.

"In the beginning, we would get a typewritten — or handwritten, in Sandy's case — lyric sheet, and often, when we would write the music to it, we would edit down the original text. It was usually more verbose than it wound up being on the record. But if I thought the lyric was good and important, I always prefer to write music that works with the original lyrics.

"My lead style at that point was heavily influenced by Danny Kalb of the Blues Project. I was in a band in college with Albert and we covered a lot of Blues Project songs, and to do that I had to woodshed Danny Kalb's leads — that kind of fast, pentatonic stuff. I've carried that through my entire life."

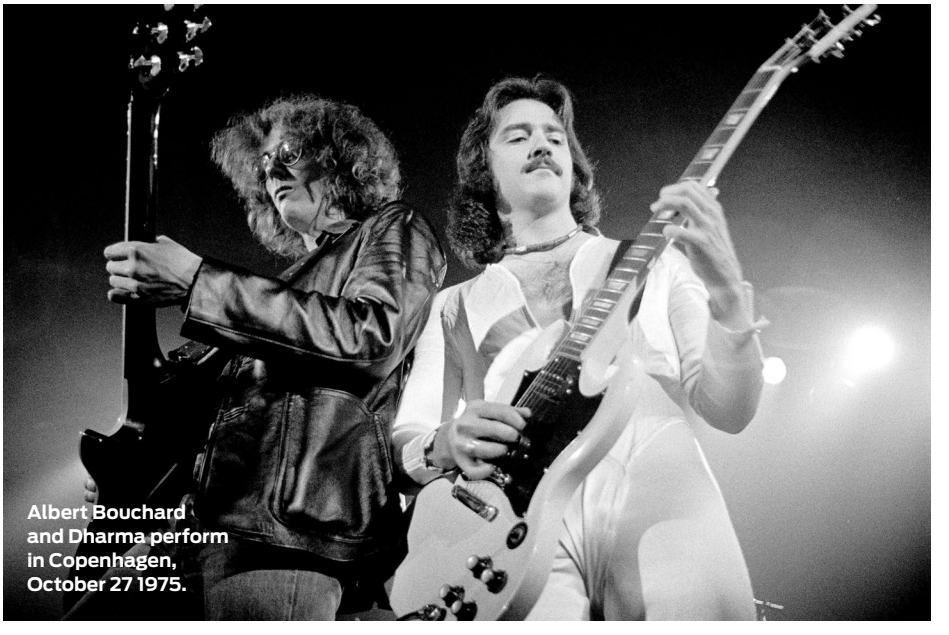
"BEFORE *SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE*, WE NEVER PLAYED THE COWBELL LIVE. WE HAD TO START WHEN THE SKIT BECAME SO POPULAR"

"ASTRONOMY"
SECRET TREATIES (1974)



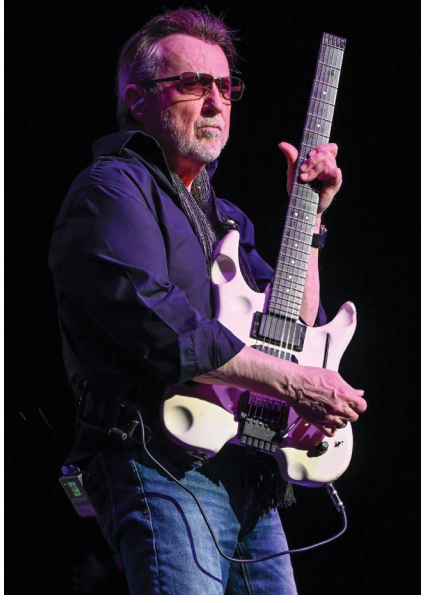
"We all really respected and liked this song and enjoyed playing it. It became a big showpiece in the live set: Eric had a bracelet that would shoot a laser beam at the mirror ball in the center of the arena. It was just a transcendent moment. There was a big guitar solo for me in there, and it transported people in the audience to another place in the way a lot of other songs didn't. We had a couple of other songs that did a similar thing: 'Veteran of the Psychic Wars' and 'Last Days of May.' They were showpieces that did that, too.

"That's Sandy Pearlman's lyric, of course. It was part of his *Imaginos* song cycle. [*Pearlman's sci-fi concept told the story of alien powers driving humankind to an apocalyptic battle with evil.*] At various times he wanted us to record the entire *Imaginos*, which we always resisted. We would do pieces of it, as when we recorded 'Astronomy,' but to do the whole thing wouldn't leave room for anybody else to write. Had he lived long enough, maybe we would've taken it on. But



Albert Bouchard and Dharma perform in Copenhagen, October 27 1975.

ED PERLSTEIN/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES (1978); JORGEN ANGEL/REDFERNS (1975)



Dharma plays his custom Steinberger Cheeseburger at Thunder Valley Casino Resort , Lincoln, California, April 1, 2023.

instead, Albert did it after he left Blue Öyster Cult, in 1981. He spent a lot of effort on it, but Columbia didn't like it. [*The label rejected the album in 1984.*] Afterward, Eric and I agreed to contribute to it and give Sandy some BOC album money. [Imaginos *was released in 1988 as the group's last recording with their original label, CBS.*] Unfortunately, it didn't really reach a wide audience at all. Actually, we've just started playing 'Astronomy' live again. It's nice to have it back in the rotation, and it's still a great song to play live."

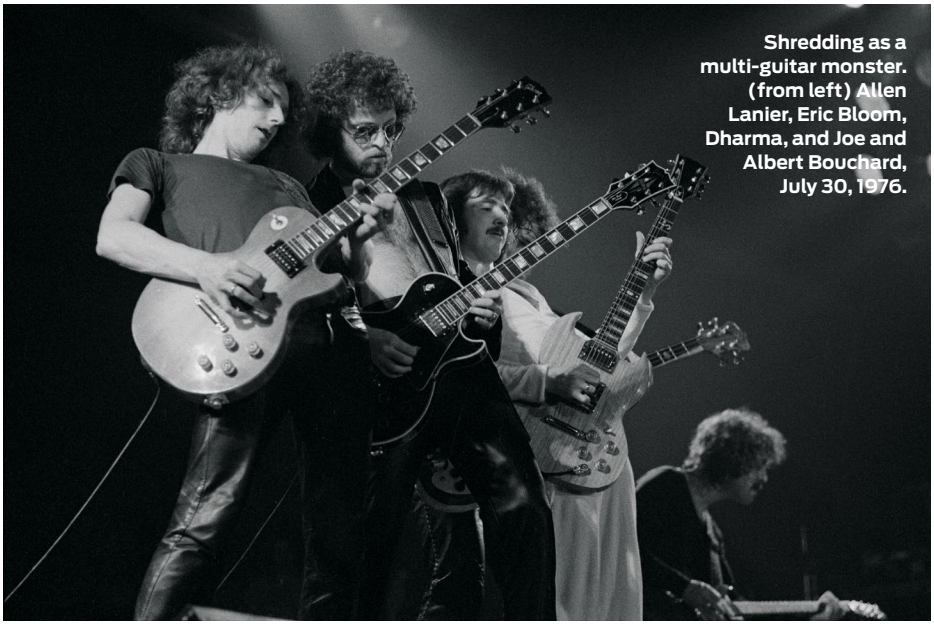
"(DON'T FEAR) THE REAPER"
AGENTS OF FORTUNE (1976)

"We wrote '(Don't Fear) The Reaper' at the point where we all had quarter-inch tape recorders. In the beginning, the band had one stereo tape recorder; we would record our rehearsal passes and then listen back and figure out if we liked it or not and how to deal with it. When Teac came out with the 3340 four-channel tape machine, we all had our own homes, and we would write and bring in more fully realized arrangements. And the first song I wrote with my recorder was '(Don't Fear) The Reaper.'

"The guitar riff that opens the song just came out of my head when I sat down and played my guitar. I realized I had something nifty, so I recorded it and messed around with that. The first couple lines of lyrics basically were stream of conscious, and the story emerged from that. It came from me being diagnosed with a heart arrhythmia, which I've had my whole life, so it's not a big deal; I take medication for it. But at the time I was thinking of being mortal and just the idea of dying early and leaving your loved ones behind, and then sort of getting back together again, imagining there's some life after death.

"It took about six weeks to finish the story, arrange the song and create the middle section. But the demo I brought the band was pretty much the way the song was recorded. The cowbell [*laughs*] was an afterthought. The funny thing is, before the [Saturday Night Live] skit, the band never played the cowbell live. We had to start playing it after the skit came out and became so popular.

"BOC was never a singles band. We were lucky to have a few that did well, starting with 'Reaper.' I thought, This song's gonna get some FM play, but I didn't think it was gonna be big. So it surprised me. It surprised all of us, I think."



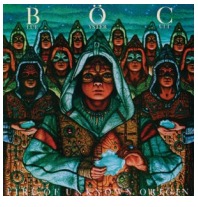
Shredding as a multi-guitar monster. (from left) Allen Lanier, Eric Bloom, Dharma, and Joe and Albert Bouchard, July 30, 1976.

"GODZILLA"
SPECTRES (1977)

"I wrote this on guitar in a hotel room in Dallas. It was probably my SG that was originally Cherry and repainted white. I played it through a Pignose amp. I didn't often write stuff that was consciously heavy; I generally write for my own voice, so I go for the more melodic stuff. But in the case of 'Godzilla,' it just happened that way.

"I was into the movie, of course — the first one [*from 1954*]. I wrote the lyrics in one piece and thought, Okay, I'm gonna write more, but then I couldn't. So it's basically a chorus and two verses. That's all there is to that song. But while there's not much to it, it puts the point across."

"BURNIN' FOR YOU"
FIRE OF UNKNOWN ORIGIN (1981)



"This is a Richard Meltzer lyric, and I would say it's arguably him at his most sentimental. He wrote that and I demoed it. I was going to put it on my solo record [*1982's* Flat Out], but Sandy convinced me to give it to the band. It probably found a wider audience with Blue Öyster Cult than it would have on my solo record.

"I used my multitrack recorder to do the first part, then I played the harmony to it, and then I did the intro. In those days, it seemed like every song had a strong opening like that, be it '(Don't Fear) The Reaper' or 'Burnin' for You,' or 'Godzilla,' even. They're all guitar-driven, as was the fashion in that period of time. It just worked.

"I probably wrote it at home on one of my guitars, a Gibson or another. I had a Stratocaster by that point, but I generally favored Gibson guitars, just for their playability and humbucking pickups. When I recorded it, I used a Vulcan, which was a limited-production guitar made by Giuliano Balestra, a luthier in White Plains, New York."

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES (1976); STEVE JENNINGS/GETTY IMAGES (2023)

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The Knockoff That Became a Knockout

Forced to stop copying U.S. guitars, Ibanez launched the all-original **Artist** line and took America by storm.

AMONG THE MANY guitars that took their design cues from a handful of seminal designs, the Ibanez Artist Model 2617 stood out as distinctly different, even enticingly exotic. And yet it looked undeniably classic.

The golden age of American electric-guitar design and manufacture stretched from the early 1950s to the mid '60s. For Japanese guitars, however, the renaissance didn't occur until a decade later. Today, nearly a quarter of the way through the 21st century, players are again appreciating the quality and originality that made these late-'70s and early '80s creations so desirable and successful in the first place.

Many fans of Japanese electric guitars refer to the mid to late '70s as the "lawsuit era," a term that references the direct copies of American guitars that arrived from that country just before its guitar makers began creating models based on original designs. In truth, Gibson rarely ever filed lawsuits against Japanese manufacturers, as they would have been difficult to pursue and enforce from such a distance. However, the company did sue Elger, Ibanez's U.S. importer, in 1978, putting the squeeze on any direct copies brought into the American market.

Predictably, Ibanez responded by producing original designs for export to America. In fact, the brand had been designing and building some unequivocally original models before the lawsuit, many of them under the Artist banner, which it had also applied to several guitars that closely aped Gibson's Les Paul and SG. Copies continued to emerge after 1978 but weren't shipped to the American market, making it more difficult for Gibson to enforce restrictions imposed by the U.S. courts.

IBANEZ SHOWED IT COULD RIVAL U.S. MAKERS WITH APPEALINGLY ORIGINAL DESIGNS

The origin of the Ibanez brand dates to a time shortly after the founding of its parent company, Hoshino Gakki, in Nagoya, Japan, in 1908. Similar to many sellers of affordable guitars in America in the early 20th century, Hoshino Gakki began primarily as a sheet-music distributor and soon after branched into musical instruments by importing reputable classical guitars from Spanish maker Salvador Ibáñez. By the late '30s, Hoshino Gakki was making its own guitars, but the company retained the Ibanez brand name on many of them. From there, it largely followed the general trends in guitar design, going big into electrics following the guitar boom of the 1960s.

Early Ibanez electrics looked much like what we expect to see from Japanese guitars of the '60s, echoing features familiar in guitars from Teisco, Kawai, Fujigen and others. By the '70s, however, the brand's offerings often reflected accurate takes on the designs of many American makers, perhaps Gibson most prominently. But alongside their cloned looks, these guitars displayed impressive advances in quality that caught the attention of American buyers at a time when the caliber of American-made guitars was in decline. These overseas makers saw that a share of the market was ripe for the taking, and they grabbed it. Once they proved they could sell successfully in the U.S. market, they demonstrated that they could rival American makers with appealingly original designs.

The distinctive double-cutaway Ibanez Artist guitars were introduced in 1976, and by 1978 the range boasted its own catalog with Steve Miller on the cover and an extensive

GUITAR COURTESY OF RICK'S VINTAGE GUITARS. PHOTOS BY RICK BENEGBI

ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS

- Double-cutaway body made from solid ash
- German-carved top, contoured back
- Glued-in maple neck with 24.75" scale length
- Abalone top purfling and block fingerboard inlays
- Dual Super 80 humbucking pickups
- Gibraltar bridge and tailpiece
- Gold-plated hardware

collection of solidbody, semi-acoustic and double-neck guitars inside. The solidbodies may have been tangentially influenced by a marriage of Gibson's SG and Les Paul, though perhaps not as overtly as the semi-acoustic Artist Model 2629 and 2630 were influenced by the ES-335. Still, they gave the overall impression of originality in everything from body to headstock to hardware (including the easy-load Gibraltar tailpiece and extended-intonation Gibraltar bridge mounted into a brass sustain block). Some even featured unique, elaborate adornments.

The Model 2617 featured here is a case in point. In addition to being made from solid ash (a distinctly non-Gibson wood) with a recessed "German carve" at its body's edges and a contoured back, it had abalone purfling around the edges of the top, abalone block inlays in the rosewood fretboard, and gold hardware. The glued-in neck was made from rock maple, and the headstock's profile was

BY DAVE HUNTER

topped with an inset "wing" of sorts, taking it well away from the "open-book" Gibson headstock that got earlier copies into trouble.

Equipped with Ibanez Super 80 pickups when it was made in 1978, this example now features more contemporary PAF-style replacements with gold covers. And while the two mini-toggle switches might look at home on an Artist of the era, they are modifications made by a previous owner to upgrade this Model 2617's specs to those of the Model 2619. Built with a more Gibson-esque solid-mahogany body and carved maple top, the 2619 had two three-way mini-toggles to offer full-humbucking, split-coil and reverse-phase-humbucking sounds from each pickup.

Topping the 2619 in bonus electronics, the Model 2622 was the ultimate "standard" Artist design, and was often referred to as "the Steve Miller model" thanks to his endorsement. The 2622 also had a solid-mahogany body, carved maple top, and abalone and mother-of-pearl block inlays, along with active preamp and EQ stages. The latter included knobs for bass, midrange and treble, which could be bypassed if desired, and delivered several decibels of gain from a nine-volt-powered circuit in the preamp. Lesser seen, and even more elaborate, the Artist Custom Model 2700 was clearly inspired by Alembic guitars, with a laminated maple-and-walnut through-neck, a body made from a sandwich of zebrawood and ash, the active preamp and EQ stages of the Steve Miller model, and the coil switching of the 2619.

Ibanez had even greater success in later years when it began making Superstrat shred machines with pointy headstocks, but the Artist models and their late-'70s siblings established the brand as a professional-quality maker. In addition to Miller's endorsement, Artist-derived signature models hit the stage with the Grateful Dead's Bob Weir, the Doobie Brothers' Pat Simmons, session guitarist Marlo Henderson, country picker Randy Scruggs, Sly & the Family Stone guitarist Freddie Stone, and others, while John Scofield adopted the 335-like semi-acoustic Artist, which was eventually configured for him as a Signature model.

BY JIM CAMPILONGO

Steel of a Deal

Jerry Byrd's *Steel Guitar Favorites* packs a heap of American styles in one outstanding disc.

FOR ALMOST EIGHT years, I've wanted to write about Jerry Byrd's *Steel Guitar Favorites*. "What took so long," you ask? Well, it doesn't make the job easy if there are no informative liner notes and hardly a thing about it on the internet. Steel-guitar guru Joe Goldmark suggested a possible personnel lineup. The rest was pure detective work.

I sometimes wish I could write a column consisting only of the words "Check this out," because many of the records I love have a glaring void of information. That said, they need to be shared, and that includes Jerry Byrd's *Steel Guitar Favorites*.

Byrd was born in Ohio, in 1920, and started playing steel guitar as a child. He went pro by the time he was 15 and would go on to perform or record with artists that include Dolly Parton, Patsy Cline, Hank Williams, Ernest Tubb, Chet Atkins and Red Foley, to name a few. Byrd was influenced by Hawaiian music and never strayed far from it, but he remains one of the fathers of classic steel guitar. While his discography is extensive, I favor this Byrd LP because it finds him interpreting a range of "American" styles, including blues, western swing and jazz.

BYRD SOUNDS ALMOST HENDRIX-LIKE, USING SLIDES, SWELLS AND GLISSANDOS THAT KISS THE SKY

Released on the Mercury label in 1958, *Steel Guitar Favorites* features Zeke Turner and Louis Innis on guitars, Red Turner on bass, Tommy Jackson on fiddle, and vocalist Rex Allen, who sings "Steelin' the Blues," which opens side one. According to the wonderful *Guitar Player* compact disc *Legends of Guitar*, this recording was cut in 1949, when it was released as a 78 rpm record. It's played in D♭ to give open-string options to Mr. Byrd's steel-guitar tuning, and the end result is pleasing and flashy. Smooth as silk and always inventive, Jerry and company breathe life into "Steel Guitar Rag," while "Cocoanut Grove" follows in a style that's classic smooth country jazz. The organ solo is a surprisingly perfect touch that is uncredited. "Texas Play Boy Rag" lives up to its name and conjures up Bob Wills' "San Antonio Rose" (to which it bears a strong resemblance) with great playing and eventful changes. It's followed by the showstopper "Limehouse Blues," a tour de force featuring locked-in harmonized guitars and a Jerry Byrd solo that sounds almost Hendrix-like. Jerry slides, uses tone and volume swells, and plays glissandos that kiss the sky, Byrd style. Side one closes with a definitive version of "The Jitterbug Waltz," on which Byrd brings out every lovely nuance the song offers.

Side two opens with "Panhandle Rag," which is played with authority and ease. It's followed by "Steelin' the Chimes," a tune reminiscent of the classic track "Rose City Chimes" and is yet another powerhouse in the litany of loveliness this LP offers. "Steelin' the Chimes" features harmonics, sweet steel voicings and a breathtaking guitar solo to boot. "Wang Wang Blues" is another classic steel-guitar jazz song on which Byrd performs every steel-guitar treat one could hope for, including tone sweeps that convincingly replicate the human voice. "Georgia Steel Guitar" is a swinging two-beat with a great guitar solo reminiscent of Chet Atkins' "hot" style of playing, and the melodic mid-tempo "Wabash Wah-Wah Blues" features a clever overdubbed question-and-answer exchange that Byrd creates by manipulating tone swells. "Gold Coast Blues" closes the LP with a harmonized guitar and steel head that is moving and infectious.

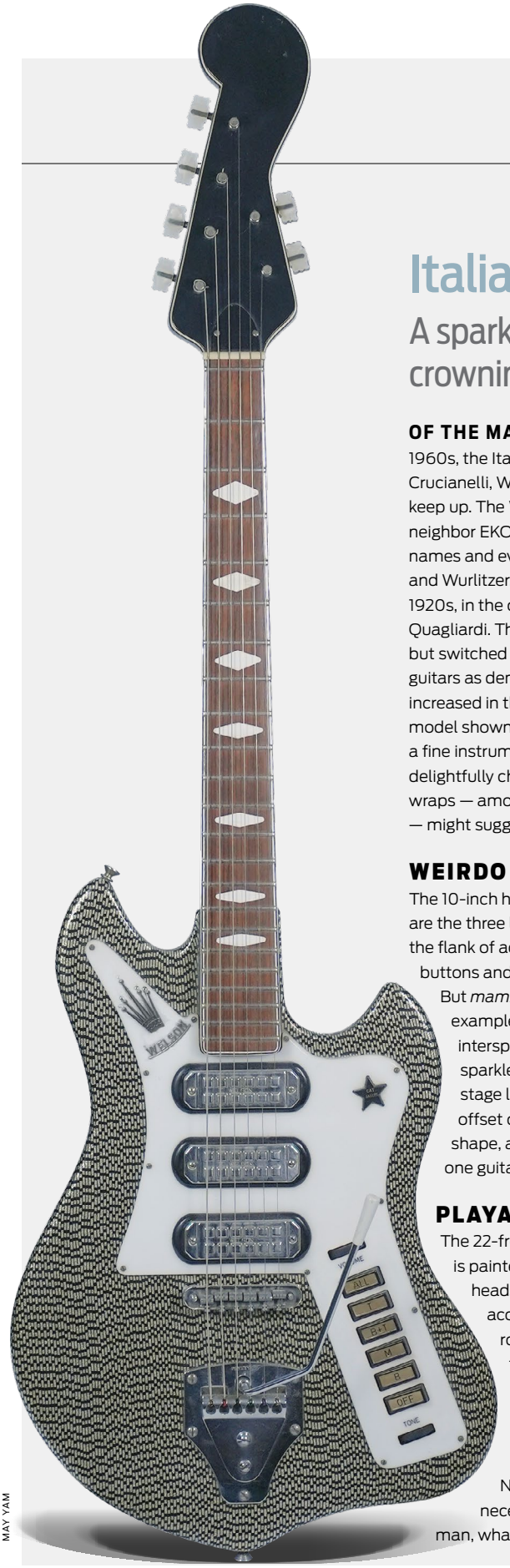
Cut for cut, *Steel Guitar Favorites* is an outstanding album and one of my top five favorite steel-guitar LPs. If this column leaves you itching to "check this out," head over to YouTube and search for "Limehouse Blues" credited to Jerry Byrd & the String Dusters. It's convincing stuff.

Look for the release of Jim Campilongo 4TET's new album, She Loved the Coney Island Freak Show, *in July 2024.*

BY TERRY CARLETON

Italian Dressing

A sparkly accordion-style finish provides the crowning touch on this 1964 Welson Kinton V3.



MAY YAM

OF THE MANY weird guitars from the 1960s, the Italians are my favorites. EKO, Vox, Crucianelli, Wandre and Gemeli... it's hard to keep up. The Welson company, like its Italian neighbor EKO, produced guitars under many names and even made a few models for Vox and Wurlitzer. Welson was founded in the 1920s, in the city of Castelfidardo, by Orlando Quagliardi. The company made accordions but switched to manufacturing electric guitars as demand for the instrument increased in the '60s. The 1964 Kinton V3 model shown here reveals that Welson was a fine instrument maker, even though the delightfully cheesy accordion-style celluloid wraps — among numerous other features — might suggest otherwise.

WEIRDO FACTOR

The 10-inch headstock is an eye catcher, as are the three large chrome-covered pickups, the flank of accordion-style pickup selector buttons and the diamond fretboard inlays. But *mamma mia*, that finish! This example features gold rectangles interspersed with black blocks, and the sparkles in the gold really pop under stage lights. Combine all that with the offset cutaways and unusual body shape, and you've got a lot of weird in one guitar.

PLAYABILITY & SOUND

The 22-fret neck has a zero fret and is painted gloss black, as is the headstock. It's chunky, like an acoustic guitar's neck, and has a rosewood fingerboard. Although this model is standard scale, I've strung it as a baritone, using D'Addario nicklewound (.014–.068) strings, which work great with the neck's tension. No extra adjustments were necessary. I've tuned it B to B, and, man, what a sound!

The three pickups have great tone but are microphonic, surprisingly. The bridge unit is on the bright side, the middle is full-bodied and great for strumming, and using the neck pickup makes the Kinton sound like a bass, especially with baritone strings. The pickup switches allow for a variety of combinations and include a universal killswitch. The tone and volume wheels are global.

Hardware-wise, the fancy translucent tuners still work beautifully and are enclosed in groovy chrome teardrops, while the bridge is of the Tune-o-matic variety and pairs nicely with the tremolo system, which works surprisingly well. Played with distortion, the Welson is aggressive, loud and growly. And as many of you may know, the sound of a low-C power chord is breathtaking.

VALUE

In 1964, the Welson Kinton V3 had a list price well under $200. Today, these guitars are revered by players and collectors alike, and you can expect to pay upward of $2,000 for one in good condition.

WHY IT RULES

I can't say it plays great by modern standards, but I've gotten used to it. Besides, it looks fantastic and sounds wholly unique.

Thanks to Gabriel Horn at my favorite California music store, The Starving Musician, for hipping me to the fact that a standard electric can be strung as a baritone.

Got a whack job? Feel free to get in touch with me at rtcarleton@gmail.com. Who knows? Maybe I'll write about it!

‘I PLAY LESS NOTES THESE DAYS, BUT THEY ALL MEAN A LOT MORE’

On *Broken*, **Walter Trout** packs his licks for maximum impact as he testifies to the hope that can save our divided world.

BY MARK McSTEA

PHOTOGRAPHY BY LELAND HAYWARD

“IT’S A ROUGH TIME,” veteran blues guitarist Walter Trout attests. “The whole world feels like it’s in a dark place, with the wars going on. In this country, the political polarization definitely feels like we’re very divided. It feels like a very scary time for the world.”

That sense of fear was heavy on Trout’s mind as he set out to write the dozen tracks on *Broken* (Mascot), his 31st solo album since he left John Mayall’s band in 1989. But far from wallowing in dread, Trout’s new songs take the listener on a journey out of the darkness and into redemptive light. “I feel like we’re at a pivotal moment in world history,” he tells *Guitar Player*. “Which way are we going to go, you know? I think there’s some concern that’s reflected on this album, but I believe that the overall theme, by the end of the record, is that there’s still some hope. I’ve got to hold on to hope.”

Trout sounds convincingly committed to that goal on *Broken*. The energy, passion and fire that he brings to his playing, both live and on the new record, belie the fact that just 10 years ago he underwent a liver transplant that saved his life but left him unable to play guitar, which he had to relearn from scratch. His emotively expressive fretwork on *Broken* fulfills all the expectations set by his stellar past work, but the record throws a few curve balls into the mix as well. “I tried a couple of new approaches and went a little out of the box on this record,” Trout explains. “And I’m really excited about how well it turned out.”

Powered by the album’s hard-rocking lead single, “Talking to Myself,” *Broken* debuted at the top of the *Billboard* Blues chart. Adding to his pleasure at the news, Trout says the outlook for his health remains positive. “I get monitored at UCLA Liver Clinic, and every few months I go in for blood tests,” he says. “They said that I was probably at the healthiest that I’ve ever been in my whole life. I feel like I’m a young man again. I’m full of energy and have the cholesterol count of a marathon runner. I’m doing great, man, so hopefully I can keep doing this and I’ve got a few more records in me.”

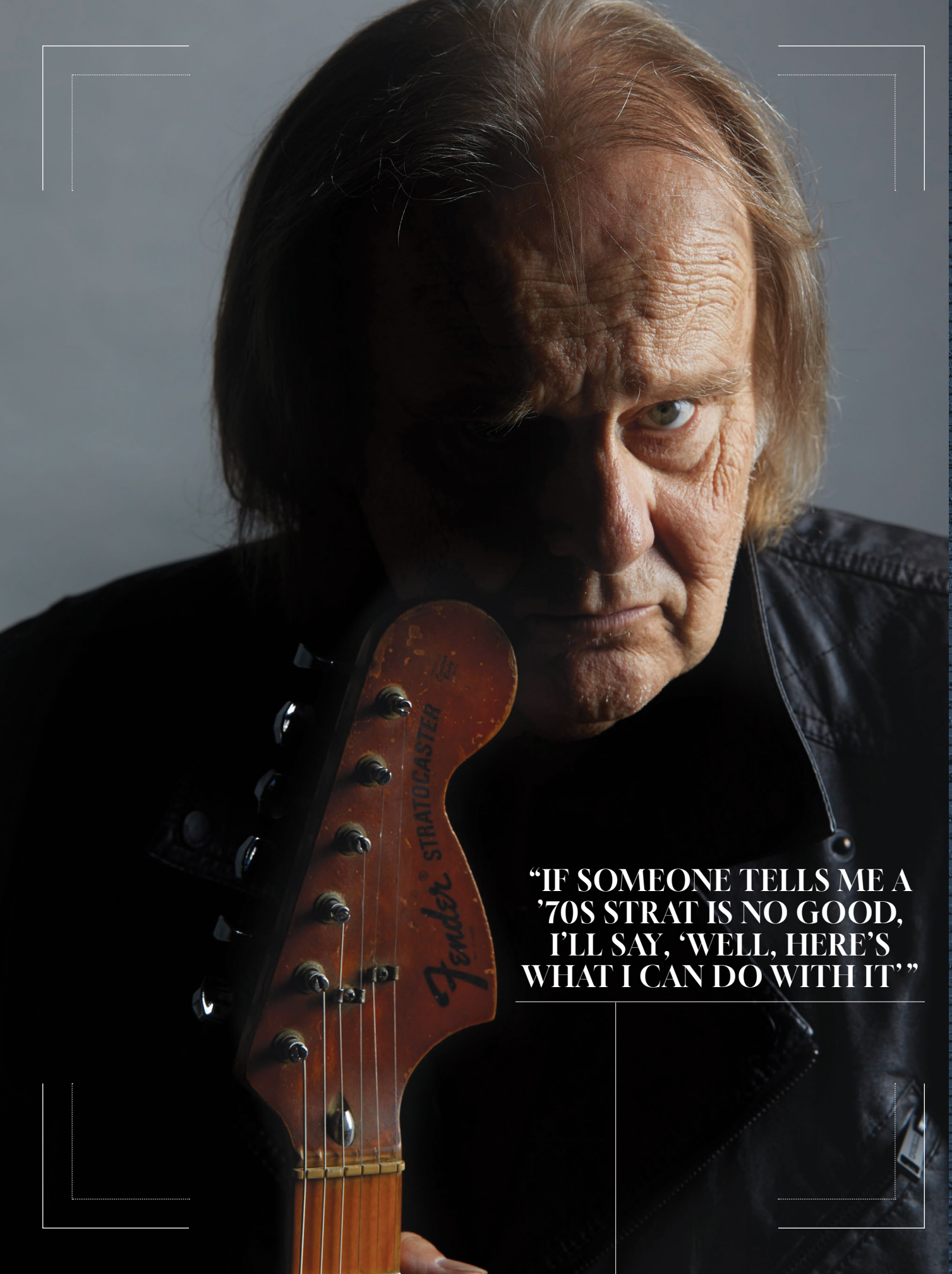
There’s quite a somber tone to *Broken*. Even the title sounds a little bleak.

When I make a record, I sequester myself for two weeks and I write all the songs. I’m not a guy who can sit in the hotel and write songs while I’m on the road; I have to concentrate and get myself in a certain zone, and it’s really good that I’m not around people at that point.

During the writing process for this album, I’d been watching the news, and I was getting myself into a certain frame of mind. And then — *boom* — they all came out. I guess maybe there was a theme. When I wrote [*2020’s*] *Ordinary Madness*, there was a lot on there that related to mental illness and therapy, which I’ve been through in my life. With [*2022’s*] *Ride*, when I listened to it, I realized that almost the whole album was about my childhood.

And I think *Broken* is really about the state of the world. With the track “Broken,” I wasn’t really thinking about the world; I was thinking about my years as a heroin addict and an alcoholic and being homeless, and also a lot of friends

ROB ANTONELLO/GUITARIST MAGAZINE (INSET)



“IF SOMEONE TELLS ME A ’70S STRAT IS NO GOOD, I’LL SAY, ‘WELL, HERE’S WHAT I CAN DO WITH IT’ ”

of mine dying from overdoses. That sort of turned into a metaphor for the world, with all these wars going on.

The sequencing of the tracks takes the listener through quite a journey, as the more positive, upbeat tracks kick in to switch the overall feel of the album.
You're exactly right there. I'm glad you picked up on that. I sequenced the album with my wife, Marie, and Eric Corne, my producer. We're trying to take the listener on a rollercoaster ride. That's what I try to do in my live shows as well.

Do the songs change much between writing them and putting then down in the studio with the band?
On the last few albums, I rehearsed the songs with the band for a few days before we went into the studio. I have an amazing band of top-rate musicians, and they always have great suggestions about how we should put things together. Once we get into the studio, Eric Corne will have some great ideas as well. He's a great musician and a Grammy-nominated songwriter. I'm happy to take ideas onboard, although if I feel strongly about something I will insist on what I want, as I do have a certain vision and idea of what I want the song to sound like. We work very quickly in the studio these days, since everything is mostly arranged by the time we get there.

"Talking To Myself," the lead single, moves away from the blues-rock vibe heard on much of the album.
You're exactly right. I was in my car, listening to a radio station that was playing hits from the '60s, from when I was a teenager: the Buckinghams, Paul Revere, the Byrds, the early electric Bob Dylan and the Band. I thought to myself that I wanted to try to write something in that vein — something that would sound right if you were listening to AM radio in your car in 1967. The lyrics came after being fed up with people ranting on social media. When the track was finished, I was unsure how to approach the solo, and I said I thought it needed an electric sitar. Thomas Ross Johansen, who owned the studio and played keyboards on many of the tracks, said, "Give me an hour," and sure enough, an hour later, a friend of his brought a '60s Coral electric sitar to the studio. I just played it once for the solo, and that was it.

Dee Snider, an unlikely guest, is on "I've Had Enough," which is a great, pounding rocker.
I had a blast doing this with him. He's an amazing, knowledgeable man. He's nothing like what you might think if you only know Twisted Sister. We're friends, and he sent me a message saying, "How about if I sing a track on your album?" I thought, If I'm going to have a rock icon on my record, I'm going to have to write a rock song. This is another one where I was watching the news on TV while I was writing the album and I switched it off, thinking, Fuck this, I've had enough. And then a lightbulb went on in my head. [*laughs*] Ten minutes later, I had the lyrics.

"Breathe" is another song that deviates from the blues-rock template, taking a strong country-fueled approach.
I was thinking of the Faces when I recorded this one. The solo was just recorded live with the band while we laid the track down. I figured I needed to approach things differently, rather than play blues licks. When I was very young, I played a lot of traditional country music.

When you put a strongly melodic statement solo like that down, will you reproduce it live?
There's no way I can do that live — I've never been able to play the same thing

Trout performs with Supersonic Blues Machine at Notodden Blues Festival in Norway, August 6, 2016.

ROB ANTONELLO/GUITARIST MAGAZINE

more than once. Even way back when I was in a country band, at 19 years old, we were playing a song by Merle Haggard called "Mama Tried," which has a four-note lick that starts the song. It has to be played exactly the same every night, and by the fourth night I started fucking it up because I have to play completely spontaneously — the way I feel something — every night. That's one of the joys for me, to be able to play spontaneously and freely in the moment — that sense of release.

"Heaven or Hell" has great lyrics, almost like something Raymond Chandler would write.

That's great. [*laughs*] I really like that comparison. They were inspired by a talk I had with a blind street preacher in the U.K. a long time ago. But more recently, I saw some southern preacher on TV saying anyone who allows their son to become trans should be shot in the head and gay people should be eradicated from the face of the earth. These are people purporting to be Christians. If you firmly believe in heaven and hell and you're preaching the murder of gay and trans people, then you're going to hell, if you believe in that concept. My kid, Biscuit, is nonbinary and that bigotry and pure hatred really outrages me. They've completely missed the point. Religion should not be about hate.

My son, Jon, plays guitar on this one as well. In fact, I have a lot of family connections on this record. My wife, Marie, co-wrote a number of lyrics. Jon's partner, Vera Armbruster, plays classical harp. They're both in the Royal Conservatory of Music in Denmark, and she played harp on "Love of My Life." And finally, my middle child, Biscuit, wrote the last track on the album, "Falls Apart," as well as doing the vocal arrangement for it and singing background vocals.

What were your go-to guitars and amps for the album?

I mainly used a Delaney Guitars Walter Trout model. Most of the album was recorded with that, which is also the guitar that I use on tour. Anything else was my 1973 Fender Strat, which is the guitar that the signature model was based on. The amp that I used was my old Mesa/Boogie Mark IV for every track. So one amp and two guitars. [*laughs*] I can just blow through everything with that.

Was the Delaney intended to be a clone of your old Strat?

Yeah. Michael Delaney did a magnificent job. The one thing that he changed, at my request, was the weight. My old Strat weighs more than a Les Paul that I have. One of the main reasons that I can't use it onstage is that my shoulders can't take the weight anymore. The signature model is so light that you can hold it up with your pinkie.

Is there much difference in sound between the two guitars?

They're actually very close. He really tried to replicate the sound of the guitar. My old Strat does have something unique about it. I bought it off the shelf in 1973, and I'm the only person who's ever owned it.

> "THAT'S ONE OF THE JOYS FOR ME, TO BE ABLE TO PLAY SPONTANEOUSLY AND FREELY"

For many people, the early '70s Strats are the least fashionable and desirable models.

Absolutely. When people tell me what's good or not good, I always think, I'll make up my own mind. I remember going to see Little Feat in the early '70s, and Lowell George was using a brand-new guitar. I never saw Jimi Hendrix playing a '50s Strat. It's my own opinion, but I think that all that vintage guitar stuff is bullshit. If someone tells me a '70s Strat is no good, I'll say, "Well, here's what I can fucking do with it." [*laughs*]

You mentioned to me a couple of years ago that you'd been watching a few things on YouTube during lockdown, including how to sweep pick like Yngwie. Did you ever find a place to utilize that in your music?

No. In fact I've actually gone in the opposite direction. I've moved toward much simpler, strong melodic statements in my soloing. I play less notes these days, but they all mean a lot more.

WATER UNDER THE BRIDGE

As he releases *One Deep River*, **Mark Knopfler** reflects on the guitars he's loved, the music that keeps his passion youthful… and how he'd like a do-over on that Dire Straits Rock Hall induction.

BY GARY GRAFF

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOBY SESSIONS

Talking with Mark Knopfler about guitars — what else? — is a bit like speaking with an unrepentant kid and a hardened member of GAA: Guitar Aficionados Anonymous.

"I STILL STOP AND LOOK in a guitar shop window when I pass one on the street. I can't walk past it," Knopfler confesses via Zoom from his home in London. "And all the clichés — nose up against the glass, that whole thing. I suppose there were a lot of years where, instead of music being music and songs being a dream — a kid's dream — it became work. It becomes your life. And I'm not alone there.

"So I have to try hard to keep it 'teenage' — to stay the kid about it. It's an endlessly fascinating thing to be part of. And it goes on. History goes on."

And this year Knopfler, now 74 and more than 45 years onward from his first album with Dire Straits, is adding a few chapters to his history.

There was his January guitar auction, a somewhat shocking sale of 123 instruments through Christie's that netted more than $11 million, including $100,000-plus for 28 of them and a record $876,000 for a 1959 Vintage Gibson Les Paul Standard with a sunburst finish. That was followed by a new version of his 1983 film composition "Going Home: Theme of the Local Hero," which Knopfler and longtime wingman Guy Fletcher turned into a benefit single for Teenager Cancer Trust in the U.K. and Teen Cancer America, using a who's-who roster of guitar-playing mates and other all-stars, including what is thought to be the final recording by the late Jeff Beck.

But the star attraction is *One Deep River* (British Grove), Knopfler's 10th solo album and first in six years. It's the product of a prolific time. The 12-song core set is complemented by four bonus tracks on the vinyl LP and a different five cuts on the CD. The sessions spawned another EP of four songs, unified thematically by lyrics about British showground boxing culture of yore.

"Maybe it's pandemic-based," says Knopfler, who on top of everything else also launched a syndicated TV show, *Johnson and Knopfler's Music Legends*, with AC/DC frontman and fellow northern Englishman Brian Johnson. "Throughout COVID, I was just listening to songs all the time," he explains. "There was a lot to work with, once we could get back to working."

He already had quite a history to add to, of course. In addition to Dire Straits' somewhat limited output (just six studio albums in their nearly 19 years together), Knopfler has cooked up those solo albums — starting with *Golden Heart* after Straits broke up — and nine film scores, including music for the movies *Local Hero*, *Cal*, and *Comfort and Joy*, all three of which predate Dire Straits' 1985 breakthrough, *Brothers in Arms*. He's also released albums with the all-star Notting Hillbillies (*Missing... Presumed Having a Good Time*), his hero Chet Atkins (*Neck and Neck*) and a pair with Emmylou Harris (*All the Roadrunning* and *Real Live Roadrunning*).

"I HAVE TO TRY HARD TO KEEP IT 'TEENAGE'... TO STAY THE KID ABOUT IT"

Along the way, Knopfler modestly claims, his guitar virtuosity has taken a backseat to his songwriting talents.

"I see myself much more as a songwriter these days," explains the man who's turned the "twiddly bits" from the closing solo of "Sultans of Swing" into one of rock's most iconic riffs. "I just became a songwriter, somehow, and a half-baked guitar player. I had to come to see myself as a guitar player in the first place, and music has a way of reminding you that you're nowhere. And that hasn't changed."

The Knopfler-philes among us may be rolling our eyes. But rest assured, he's just getting started.

"If anything, my grip on the guitar has gotten even worse," he continues. "The songwriting — it takes you away from concentrating on playing, and it accentuates the simplicity of a lot of my stuff that I want out of the guitar. I've almost become a sort of a half-player in the sense that I only tend to play half the notes that are there that I could play, and my fingering is all wrong. I don't hold the neck properly; I hold the neck like a plumber holds a hammer, not in a proper, artistic way.

"I think a guitar teacher would say, 'You're doing it bloody wrong! It's all bloody wrong — but it's too far gone to change it now, so you might as well just do it that way.' I'm kind of one step ahead of the cowboy chords, perhaps. But not much."

So it's kind of like my golf swing?, I suggest. "Well, that's it!" Knopfler says with a laugh. "But it gets you around the course, doesn't it?"

What Knopfler has most certainly become is an ardent, although not exclusive, fingerpicker, a skill he developed early on that has become his preferred playing style.

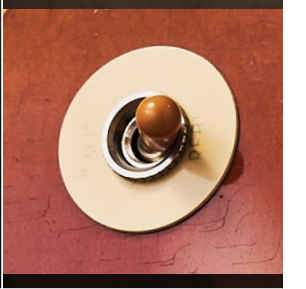
"I started using more and more fingerpicking and less and less plectruming," he acknowledges. "I think lack of use, plus three bouts of COVID, probably phased out the plectrum for me. I just kept losing them and would be fingerpicking more — not necessarily fingerpicking better, just more. And it proved to be just a bit more comfortable for me."

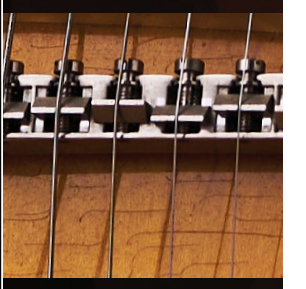
Nevertheless, Knopfler doesn't want his picks to feel like they've been abandoned like undesired puppies. "I want to bow to the plectrum and say it's a superior thing," he explains. "It's louder. It's faster. It's got a better signal. It's the best amplifier there is. I didn't give it up until recently. I was capable of playing things with a plectrum quite a lot, and I would do all the rhythm parts with one all the time.

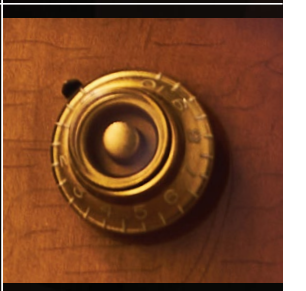
"Occasionally I would do a sort of Hank imitation," he adds, referencing his childhood hero Hank Marvin of the Shadows. "If I wanted a part where I would need to have a plectrum and play

2016 GIBSON CUSTOM SHOP MARK KNOPFLER '58 LES PAUL STANDARD PROTOTYPE

This is the first prototype of the guitar based on Knopfler's original 1958 'Burst, which remains in his keeping. It was used to record "Janine" on *One Deep River* and to perform "Money for Nothing" and "Going Home" on tour in 2019.

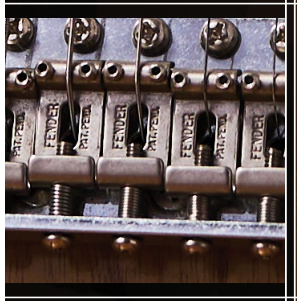






2004 FENDER STRAT

A 1954-spec model made to commemorate the Stratocaster's then 50th anniversary, this guitar has toured with Knopfler's sideman Richard Bennett, who played it from 2005 to 2019. Knopfler used this on the tracks "Tunnel 13" and "Before My Train Comes" on the new album, and Bennett played it on "This One's Not Going."



a note, I'd use the whammy bar on the note rather than the vibrato coming from my left hand."

It should be noted here that Knopfler is actually left-handed but was instructed to play guitar right-handed by his sister, who adjusted the tennis racket he would "play" as a youth. "I had to learn to keep that left hand still on the note and let the whammy bar or the tremolo arm give me the vibrato," he explains. "And, thankfully, that was something I could feel okay with.

"Hank does that beautifully," he adds, "but I'm sure he could play the guitar any way that he wanted to. I'm sure he could play flamenco if he wanted to. He's a really, really good guitar player. So occasionally if I want to have that effect, I can do it. I think there's a little bit on *One Deep River* here and there. Maybe 'Tunnel 13' has a little of that on the Strat, back there somewhere."

KNOPFLER RECORDED *ONE DEEP RIVER* with a familiar crew, most of whom were part of 2018's *Down the Road Wherever* and some albums that go back even further. Producer Guy Fletcher is joined by Jim Cox on keyboards, Richard Bennett on guitar, Glenn Worf on bass, Ian Thomas on drums, Danny Cummings on percussion, Mike McGoldrick on whistles and pipes, and John McCusker on fiddle. In addition, celebrated pedal and lap-steel player Greg Leisz (his lengthy résumé includes work with Eric Clapton, Jackson Browne, Beck and John Mayer) is onboard, along with sisters Emma and Tamsin Topolski, who provide the album's backing vocals.

"I've been wanting to play with Greg for a long time," Knopfler says, "and he fitted in as though he'd been there for 25 years. He got on with all of us just beautifully and behaved as though he was totally a member of the band. He just assumed it and loved it and was part of it, and it was as if everything had been made for him."

And even though the ensemble hadn't been able to convene for a while due to the pandemic, once everyone returned to the studio, Knopfler — who does most of his writing away from that environment — says it was just like riding the proverbial bicycle.

"Everybody just played so great, and I think the band has developed a little bit more," he says. "Playing music together for as long as we have, we now have a better vibe. Danny on percussion works great with Ian on drums, and that improves both of them. When they play together, it just helps the feel, big time. There's a lot of the intangible, little things, but that's just part of the joy of the whole thing."

"THEY'RE CHARACTERS," KNOPFLER SAYS OF THE GUITARS, "AND THERE WILL BE A SONG THAT ANSWERS FOR THEM"

In addition, Knopfler says, the troupe's recording methodology has become a kind of shorthand for the musicians. "I just sing the song to the band with an acoustic guitar, and while I'm singing it the first time, Glenn, who's one of the resident geniuses, will just write a chart. He might ask me to clarify a few things at the end of it, but pretty quickly everybody who uses a chart has one, and we're in business."

And when that happens, Knopfler, explains, "I could have a song before I know where I am, because this group of people play with each other so well. It's uncanny sometimes: You'd be amazed at how many times our first take has those things that you just don't want to do without."

Knopfler gives full props to Fletcher, who joined Dire Straits in 1984, for "keeping tabs on what we're doing" and being another hand on the wheel. But he acknowledges, too, that the ease and speed of the creativity has advantages.

Knopfler's 2011 Pensa Custom. His 2015 backup sold for about $143K in the Christie's auction.

This custom 2008 Monteleone Isabella remains a prized piece in Knopfler's collection.

"I did get the opportunity to not be over-familiar with the stuff," Knopfler says. "We could always move to something else, and everything felt right and nothing felt forced. Everything felt relaxed. If the band wants to play anything ferociously, it can. We just follow whatever way it's starting to go and feels right. There's nothing I wanted to inject into it to make things happen.

"It's an otherworldly kind of band. You can just let the song happen and possibly take credit for it at the same time — which," he adds slyly, "is a pretty clever trick, if you can do it."

PART OF THE KNOPFLER ALCHEMY, meanwhile, is the casting of specific guitars to particular songs, an act he approaches as carefully as a film director hiring actors. "You're looking for characters for the songs," he explains. "You're looking for a *voice* for the song. They all have different voices."

"THE SONGWRITING ACCENTUATES THE SIMPLICITY OF A LOT OF MY STUFF THAT I WANT OUT OF THE GUITAR"

Suffice to say he's come a long way from the £50 Hofner Super Solid purchased for him when he was an adolescent by his father, an architect and chess aficionado who fled his native Hungary after the Nazi occupation in 1939.

He remembers just one formal lesson, in fingerpicking, from Joe Davidson, the boyfriend of a friend's older sister. But Knopfler became a connoisseur well before he could afford to become a collector, noting what his favorite players used and making a mental wish list for future purchases.

"Thankfully, success meant that I could go and buy a couple of them. That wasn't for a long time," he says, "but you learn as you go along and branch off here and there. People bring you instruments and introduce you to them, and you hear other things or see them in a store and try them out. It's a long education...that's still going, really."

Get him started, and Knopfler will wax rhapsodic about guitars he's known and loved. "They're characters," he says, returning to the theme, "and there will be a song that answers for them. When you're onstage you might use something different, but when you record, that's when you find the right guitar to play for every song you have."

When it came to making *One Deep River*, he found an opportunity to give some of them one final dive into the mix before being put up in Christie's January auction. Like any six-string acolyte, he speaks of them reverently, as if describing children, and it's best

Knopfler's 1937 D'Angelico Excel, "as good a guitar as you're ever gonna find," he says.

The D'Angelico's headstock is topped by classic "pineapple and pediment" ornamentation.

to just sit back and surrender to his discourse.

"I always try a number of acoustics, and on this particular album the acoustic that burst through was actually the latest one, this Boswell 0-14, a little 14-fret parlor guitar made out of mahogany by Arthur Boswell, who used to work as Rudy Pensa's repairman in New York City. He graduated from being a repairman to being a builder and set up a workshop in Bend, Oregon. Rudy said to me, 'Marcus, I have this guitar. You have to have one.' So this little mahogany arrived, and of course I put it to work on the album and it won the audition for a whole pile of songs — at least four or five straightaway. And it's on more songs on the album itself. It's on 'Ahead of the Game,' it's on 'Tunnel 13', it's on 'Sweeter Than the Rain,' 'Before My Train Comes,' 'This One's Not Going to End Well'… That's half a dozen songs, straightaway, and there were more.

"I also want to mention a beautiful acoustic guitar called a Pete Turner Marrakesh, which is a resonator guitar that Glenn put in front of me. I don't know how it arrived, but it's an absolutely beautiful guitar where there's a lot of thought and work gone into the sound of the body. It's not just any old body attached to a resonator; there's a lot of thought in the materials, and the woods are obviously tremendous, and even the resonator has got some serious work on it. I love the guitar. [*Turner*] is very quiet and doesn't push himself — he hasn't asked for an advert or anything like that. Usually the great guitar makers, like the Boswells and Turners, don't push hard. They probably don't have to; there's tremendous integrity. So look it up, guys. It comes strongly recommended — by me.

"For the electrics, in a couple cases on the album it's been a Duesenberg. And actually, Fender made a beautiful replica of the '54 Stratocaster. I have a '54 Stratocaster anyway, which also got onto the album, but a couple of times I used the 50th anniversary model, which is really a usable, beautiful guitar and they really took a lot of care making it. It has literally got the porcelain pickups, just like the old '54s, so you can see they really took care with them. There's one that I play quite a lot which has got a serial number of zero, and that is a great, great Strat. And there's another one that I've had fitted with Callahan pickups, and I used that on a few songs.

"It's the same thing with the replica Les Pauls they made from my '58. I think they may have made 58 of them. They all passed through my hands, and they were fantastic guitars. They've even got the scratches from my belt on the back of the bodies. I'm spoiled for choice on Les Pauls, which strikes me as quite ironic, because I had to wait so long before I could get my hands on a good Les Paul.

Knopfler holds his 1937 National Style O resonator. A key part of his live and recording setup, it's one of the guitars he says he'll never part with.

"There's also a Gretsch 6120 that's used on a couple of songs. I've found from working with Richard Bennett over the years that the DynaSonic pickups ended in '57, so for me that's when the 6120 ended. [*laughs*] Now Chet says he liked the Filter'Trons and he never did like the DynaSonics. Well, I'm the opposite. I really like the DynaSonics, because of the sound. The Shadows actually used a 6120 — a lot of people don't know that — but they got a great sound with an early 6120 with the DynaSonic pickups, and you can't tell the difference between that and the Stratocaster. Everybody thought it would be a Strat, and they probably still do today. But in fact a 6120 got on quite a few early Shads tracks.

"My almost favorite electric guitar turns out to have been, of all things, a blond [*Gibson*] 330, which [*American singer-songwriter and guitarist*] Tony Joe White gave to me when we became good friends. I'd given Tony an acoustic guitar made by my old friend Steve Phillips. We were playing one day at Tony's and he just said, 'Hey, you can have that guitar. It's under the bed. Take it out and take a look and see if you want to play it.' That was the guitar he used on everything: 'Rainy Night in Georgia,' 'Groupie Girl,' 'Polk Salad Annie.' I took it out and it was covered with dust, and the fingerboard had dips and crevices from Tony's sweaty gigs. But Tony hadn't played the 330 for years, so I took it to Nashville and had a beautiful new fingerboard put on it and I've used it on every record.

"And then, obviously, there are the Pensas." Knopfler was first turned on to Rudy Pensa's namesake brand in 2012 via the 2011 custom Blue Ice Metallic MK-D that remains part of his arsenal. He's added other models since then. "I'd actually dig out a couple of the Pensas — the old black one to do the screaming, prehistoric sounds. I would use the '58 Les Paul for that too.

"I'm also lucky enough to own a D'Angelico Excel from the '30s, which has such a distinctive and beautiful sound. I'm hoping that my Monteleone Isabella" — the custom 2008 model that remains in his collection — "might one day sound like that. You can play anything on that Excel. If I'm playing cowboy chords, they sound great, and it's just because of the guitar, not the player. You can fingerpick it and it just sounds magnificent. I think those Excels from about '36 or '37, are just fantastic — as good a guitar as you're ever gonna find. They're just ridiculously good.

"You know," he adds, "Chet told me, 'A guitar's your friend for life. It'll be your best friend.' And they are. They're wonderful companions."

AFTER SITTING THROUGH a soliloquy like that, you of course have to wonder how the hell Knopfler was ever willing to part with any of his guitars, much less more than 10 dozen via auction.

"JEFF AND I HAD JUST BEGUN SOME TALKS ABOUT DOING AN ALBUM. I'M REALLY SORRY WE DIDN'T GET TO WORK TOGETHER"

"I must admit, there were a couple of things that made me gulp a little bit and wish that I was taking them home with me," he acknowledges. "But at the same time, I'm happy. You can't just have them gathering dust. It was nice to unload them. It felt good to get them moving and to go on to find other homes and make new friends. And I realized, of course, I'd become a collector, which I never thought of myself as being."

One instrument that will likely remain with Knopfler for the rest of his days is his 1961 Stratocaster — his first Strat — with which he created "Sultans of Swing" in 1977 and which has been around his shoulder ever since.

"Yeah, I still have that," he notes. What would it take to separate him from it? "I'd say a pretty strong guy — or a pretty tough-minded gang of guys. It won't go easy."

KNOPFLER DESCRIBES THIS YEAR'S "Coming Home (Theme From Local Hero)" charity remake as beautifully chaotic, an embarrassment of riches dumped at his feet — and particularly those of Fletcher, who produced the track. "It's a circular moment for me," he explains, because actually Dire Straits paid for the first Teen Cancer ward at Middlesex Trust about 30 years ago, maybe more. It went from there to University College, where it still is.

"The other day I was up in Newcastle and we launched the song there at the stadium where the Wolverhampton Wanderers play. Then I visited the ward in Newcastle where the kids were, and what a fantastic place! Guitars on the walls. It's a proper place for youngsters, and such a happy vibe. A young girl in there told me that she was carried into that ward as a baby — she's a teenager now — and at one point she spent six months in that room, and she walked out. I thought that's the best thing I've heard for ages. It was such a great thing to be there and be told that story."

The new "Going Home" has become its own kind of legend. More than 60 musicians contributed to the track, both at British Grove Studios and remotely, and you'd be hard-pressed to figure out who's missing from a roster that includes Eric Clapton, James Burton, Ry Cooder, Steve Cropper, Duane Eddy, Buddy Guy, Peter Frampton, Tony Iommi, Joan Jett, Alex Lifeson, Phil Manzanera, Steve Lukather, David Gilmour, Brian May, Steve Vai, Joe Satriani… you get the picture. Sting, Sheryl Crow and the Knopfler band's Worf play bass, with Ringo Starr and his son Zak Starkey on drums and the Who's Roger Daltrey playing harmonica.

"They just kept coming," Knopfler says with a chuckle. "It started, quite appropriately enough, with Pete Townshend, because we've known Roger [*Daltrey*]'s association with the charity for so long, and Pete's as well. It has a lot of input from the Who. So Pete came through the door first at my place, armed with a guitar and an amp, and we plugged it in and Pete played a chord.

And we were happening, because when Pete plays a chord, it stays played.

"And then I think Eric Clapton came through the doors the next day, and Jeff Beck had recorded something at his place which was so beautiful. Then David Gilmour came over, and everyone was playing great, and I was really knocked out. I thought, This is fantastic! And then all the stuff was coming on from America: Joe Bonamassa, Joe Satriani, Steve Vai... Different people, fantastic guitar playing, coming in from all sides. I came in one day and Bruce Springsteen was all over it."

Knopfler says the happy glut was the result of organizers who "just didn't stop. I remember saying to Guy, 'How are we gonna deal with all this? This is going to be 30 miles long!'"

Knopfler gives full credit to Fletcher for herding everything into a cohesive presentation. "Poor old Guy had to use all his editing skills to get it sorted, but somehow he did it."

"I'M BEST OFF WRITING THE ODD DITTY, IF I CAN. IF I GET TO MAKE A DECENT RECORD OF IT, THAT'S THE OBJECTIVE REALIZED"

Beck's part was special for all concerned, of course, because it's been largely confirmed that it's the last thing he recorded before his death on January 10, 2022. "Jeff was just something other, y'know?" Knopfler says. "In fact, we'd just begun some talks, through management, about doing an album together. I'm really sorry we didn't get to work together."

KNOPFLER HAS RECEIVED FOUR GRAMMY AWARDS during his career, as well as an Ivor Novello Award, a Steiger Award in Germany and an Edison Award from the Netherlands. He's also an Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (OBE) at home. He did, however, sit out Dire Straits' 2018 induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, which left his longtime partner, bassist John Illsley, in the awkward position of both delivering the induction speech and accepting the honor that night — an infamous Rock Hall first.

Knopfler, who never publicly acknowledged the Hall of Fame honor or said he wouldn't be attending, says he regrets not being there. "Yeah, I guess so," he admits. In particular, he gets the importance his presence would have meant to his, and the group's, many fans. "I was a rock and roll teenager, and I spent my whole young life going to see bands. For a lot of years I went to a gig at least every week without fail, so it is a big part of my life."

Not in the equation anymore, however, is touring. Knopfler and company last hit the road in 2019 to promote *Down the Road Wherever*, but even with the wealth of new material from *One Deep River* and its various configurations, he's not feeling the pull to do it again.

"Touring is for kids," he says. "It's for younger people, and stronger people. I'm old enough and I've done enough traveling. It's not fair to the people around me. It's a great thing to be with family, and the great thing is I can still write songs, and that's my thing, really, now. I think I'm best off writing the odd ditty, if I can. If I get to make a decent record of it, that's the objective realized.

"And it's harder than you think to bring it off. As a writer, I'd like to try and go on working at being successful — not commercially. I'm not bothered about that. Just being a decent writer, that's all I want. All I'm hoping for is to get a good song written and get it recorded and see if I can make a good record out of it. After all this time, that's the most important thing. Yeah."

DUESENBERG GRAN ROYALE

Knopfler's Duesenberg Gran Royale was delivered to him at a 2019 concert in Berlin at the Mercedes-Benz Arena and was used on *One Deep River*.

“YOUR INFLUENCES STICK WITH YOU”

Scott Henderson spent lockdown training his ears and building improv skills. As ***Karnevel!*** shows, his jazz chops flourished, but his blues-rock roots remain as strong as ever.

BY BILL MILKOWSKI

GROWING UP AS a die-hard blues-rocker in 1970s South Florida, Scott Henderson fell in love with the sounds of that era’s big-name rock guitarists. “Ritchie Blackmore, Jimmy Page, Jeff Beck… I grew up listening to all those guys,” Henderson tells *Guitar Player*. “I mean, your influences stick with you, man. I learned how to play by ear from listening to cats like that, and I don’t think you ever lose those roots.”

A decade later, Henderson would make a name for himself, not as a blues-rocker but as one of the prominent fusion guitarists of the ’80s and ’90s, carrying on in the tradition of his mentors Jean-Luc Ponty, Chick Corea and Joe Zawinul, all of whom he had toured and recorded with. And while Henderson may have made significant contributions to Ponty’s 1985 album, *Fables*, 1986’s *The Chick Corea Electric Band* and the Zawinul Syndicate’s 1988 outing, *The Immigrants*, it was in the context of Tribal Tech, the hard-hitting funk-fusion band he formed in 1984 with bassist Gary Willis, that his creative juices really flowed and his scintillating virtuosity truly flourished.

Henderson’s searing blues-rock roots would eventually bubble up on a series of side projects, including 1994’s *Dog Party*, 1997’s *Tore Down House* and 2002’s *Well to the Bone*. But otherwise, he seldom strayed from his love of jazz and fusion, collaborating with bassist Victor Wooten

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Scott Henderson, drummer Archibald Ligonniere and bassist Romain Labaye perform at Auditorium Parco della Musica, in Rome, April 11, 2022.

and drummer Steve Smith on two volumes of Vital Tech Tones fusion recordings and with bassist Jeff Berlin and Dennis Chambers on 2012's *HBC*, which included revved-up power-trio renditions of Zawinul's "D Flat Waltz," Wayne Shorter's "Mysterious Traveller," Billy Cobham's "Stratus" and Herbie Hancock's "Actual Proof."

More recently, the guitarist joined with the phenomenal Parisian rhythm tandem of electric bassist Romain Labaye and drummer Archibald Ligonniere to record 2019's *People Mover*. Now the trio has reprised its tight chemistry on the newly released *Karnevel!* (Mango Prom Music), which finds Henderson at the height of his six-string powers. As he tells *Guitar Player*, the new songs developed from improvisation and ear-training skills that he developed during the lengthy COVID lockdown.

"I have a lot of harmony in my head, but I don't always have access to it in real time," Henderson says. "Like, I'll play something, but it's not what I heard in my head. So I did a lot of solo guitar playing during the COVID break, just all by myself in my room. I guess what it really was is the practice of ear training. Like, if I hear it, where is it on the neck? Where is that chord I'm looking for?"

The result is that *Karnevel!* is an album of sophisticated, jazz-inspired harmony, with elaborate arrangements. But as suggested by its cover shot of a boy flashing the devil horns while riding a guitar-themed merry-go-round, Henderson hasn't completely abandoned his youthful influences. *Karnevel!* also finds him indulging in some of the blues-rock playing that informed his early years, making the album a compelling mix of the styles that have defined this virtuoso's 40-year career.

***Karnevel!* manages to combine very intricately arranged jazz cuts with surprisingly straightforward blues tracks. For example, there's no denying the sheer directness and stinging intensity of something like the shuffle blues number "Haunted Ballroom."**

Yeah, I'm trying to keep that element of the blues in the music, because I love blues. And I thought, I haven't done a I-IV-V blues progression since [*1994's*] *Dog Party*, so it was fun to get into the blues again and just play something like that. But, of course, that sense of harmony kicks in a little in the second half of the tune, where it becomes like a mixture of blues and jazz, but essentially it's a plain old, good old blues shuffle, which everybody loves. I never get tired of the chord progression.

But these days, anytime you do a I-IV-V, everybody says, "Oh, that's Stevie Ray Vaughan!" Well, I love Stevie Ray,

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> I NEVER REALLY LIKED THE SOUND OF A PICK SCRAPING ACROSS THE STRINGS. THAT'S NOT MY THING

but I wasn't really that influenced by him, because by the time he came out I had already been inspired by the same guys who influenced him, namely Albert King and Jimi Hendrix. So one of the things I try to avoid is using my middle pickup, because that's the Stevie Ray sound. I usually use my treble pickup because it sounds more like me. But as far as direct influences on me, Albert King was definitely a huge one. I think Albert King is an influence on everybody who plays guitar.

John Scofield often talks about the profound influence Albert had on him.
Yeah. And I've been influenced by John Scofield too. Sco is probably one of the first guitar players I ever heard as a kid who was playing jazz with more of a rock tone. The first time I ever heard Sco was on that [*1976*] Billy Cobham/George Duke album, *Live on Tour in Europe*, and I had never heard a guitarist play jazz lines with that kind of a rock-blues tone before. That really influenced me and got me more into jazz. Coming more from the rock and roll side, I was never into the hollowbody, clean-tone thing as much as distortion guitar. So when I heard Sco do that, I thought, So you can play those notes on electric guitar with distortion! It was a revelation to me. And that's kind of what I do these days. It's more of a bebop mode in that I'm more like a horn player.

On "Covid Vaccination" you replicate a whole horn section on multiple guitars. I'm guessing the title is a tongue-in-cheek reference to Tower of Power's "Soul Vaccination."
Yeah. That was kind of hard to do, because I had to find pedals that emulated the horns. So for the trumpet sound I used one of my distortion pedals but with a wah-wah half-open, so it had that nasal sound, like a trumpet. For the saxes it's more of a fizzy-raspy sound, so fuzz tones worked really good for that.

And I found a couple of different fuzz tones — one for the alto sax, one for the tenor sax — and then for the bari sax I tuned the low E string on my guitar way down and used a different fuzz tone for that. And for the trombone, I've got this really cool pedal called a Trombetta Robotone, which actually does make a guitar sound like a trombone. It's got that kind of fluttery thing that happens when the trombone is played really low. It was really a labor of love to do this track because I have just been blessed by Tower of Power. I love those guys and I've really enjoyed their music over the years, so it was fun to do a tribute to them.

Can you run down the different guitars you played on this project?
Most of the main parts are played with my Suhr Strats with ML Standard pickups, but I added the Jerry Jones electric sitar on "Karnevel!" and "Carnies' Time." On "Covid Vaccination" I used a Les Paul in the middle pickup position for the rhythm guitar parts, because that's the tone Bruce Conte used in Tower of Power. I also used a Danelectro '59 resonator guitar, which is basically an electric dobro, on "Bilge Rat" and "Carnies' Time." On "Acacia" I played acoustic guitar on the intro and on the ending.

On "Bilge Rat" you're playing slide guitar. You have a particularly nasty distortion sound on that track. Is that a Mooger-fooger [*MF-102 Ring Modulator*], which you've used in the past?
No, that is a combination of a Fulltone Octavia and the Zvex Fuzz Factory. I think the first part of the solo starts out with the Octavia, and then later on in the solo I kick on the Fuzz Factory. It goes into warp drive and starts making some pretty weird sounds. And on "Sky Coaster," the solo sound is a Spaceman Effects Sputnik III pedal. It's a really cool fuzz because it has an extra button that changes the circuitry and it just goes wild, so you never know what to expect. You play a little bit, you hit that button

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and it freaks out. And that kind of inspires you to play what you're going to play next, because you never know what the thing's gonna do. It's totally random. I love those kind of pedals that give you unexpected shit. It's a lot of fun.

The new record is bookended by two pieces, "Karnevel!" and "Carnie's Time," where you're playing what sounds like my Electro-Harmonix Ravish Sitar pedal.
It's a Jerry Jones electric sitar, the same guitar that Denny Dias played on Steely Dan's [*1972 hit single*] "Do It Again." I used it on my 2015 album, *Vibe Station*, too, where I did a guitar-drum duet with Alan Hertz on the song "Manic Carpet." I plugged it direct into my Fender Bassman amp and it sounded really good. The funny thing is, it's a cheap guitar — only $600. And it sounds great, but it's a bitch to tune. I probably spent more time tuning it than playing it on this new album.

Tell me about your tune "Acacia."
That's the name of a street in Florida that I used to hang out on. It's actually by a cemetery. I used to walk there at night. But I thought it would be cool to have some acoustic guitar on the record, and when I was playing solo guitar one day, those chords just came out. I came up with the melody later. But I thought it was a nice way to showcase Romain. He's such a nice chord player on the bass. He gets beautiful chords, which we also used on the tune "Blood Moon" from the *People Mover* record. It's great to have that really beautiful, super-low chordal sound. And then he overdubbed fretless on the melody. That's not one of the songs we play live, because that would be too hard to do. There's too many parts, too many things going on.

Your acoustic guitar arpeggiating on "Acacia" is so bright, it sounds like a harpsichord.
It's a combination of the acoustic guitars in stereo. The acoustic guitar has a piezo pickup under the bridge, but I also mic it with the Neumann 87. So I put the Neumann 87 on the left and the piezo pickup on the right, and it gives you this really nice stereo image of the acoustic guitar. And then I mixed in electric through a Korg Pandora PX5D multi-effects processor, which puts a sort of metallic shine behind everything. It's a combination of sounds that worked nicely together.

On a tune like "Puerto Madero," you're going back and forth between playing fingerstyle and using a pick. How did that technique develop?
I realized when I started playing trio that I was going to have to play the melody and the chords at the same time onstage. So I got into this thing of playing the melody with my fingers on the top string with chords under it. I guess the difference between me and the hollowbody guys is there's always a little bit of distortion in my chords, because it sort of evens them out; it gives them a little bit of compression. And I think hollowbody guitars have a natural compression. I hear a lot of jazz players, and, when they play, the chords seem very even. If you play a clean Stratocaster, it's not so even; notes pop out. But if you play through a pedal and get just a little bit of distortion, it compresses it so that the chords are more realized. If you played a chord on a piano you'd hear pretty much every note, and that's what I'm striving for on guitar.

Given that, was Joe Pass an influence on you, or Lenny Breau?
Not so much Joe Pass, but Lenny Breau for sure. And Wes Montgomery too. I never really liked the sound of a pick scraping across the strings. That's not my thing. Joe was more about scraping the pick across the strings, which is an old bebop sound. Bruce Foreman does that now really well, but that's not really my style. My style is to hit all the strings

> I HAVE A LOT OF HARMONY IN MY HEAD, BUT I DON'T ALWAYS HAVE ACCESS TO IT IN REAL TIME

together, like a piano player would. So I have to use my fingers.

You mentioned that you wrote all the music for *Karnevel!* during the COVID pandemic.
Yeah, I spent a lot of time during COVID just playing solo guitar. And I really wanted to improve my ability to realize harmony in real time, which is something I've never really been all that good at. So as I got better at that — and I think I spent a year practicing just that — a lot of these songs were written in real time as opposed to the sort of hunt-and-peck process of elimination way of writing that I used to do. And there's nothing wrong with it. We can't all be Joe Zawinul and sit down for five minutes and compose "Birdland." But there was a lot less of that hunt-and-peck on this record. A lot of the tunes were written in real time, just me sitting there playing the guitar and coming up with the stuff.

Is that where your solo guitar piece "Greene Mansion" came from?
Yeah, it came from playing guitar by myself, just solo, with no pre-written things. And the guys that do it so well, like Keith Jarrett — he sits there at the piano and he doesn't need a standard; he just starts playing and he goes where it goes. That's something that I really admire about people like Scott Kinsey, where he can sit down and play with nothing written and take it to so many beautiful places. That was my goal during the pandemic. So a lot of these songs were written that way.

And is that tune named for the great fingerstyle guitar master Ted Greene?
Yes. That's a good story. When I took some lessons with Ted many years ago, I was walking back to my car after one lesson, and when I looked back at his apartment building, it was one of those huge complexes that stretched out for four blocks, like a beehive. I couldn't believe that such a master lived in such an anonymous place, and I felt like he should be living in a mansion on the top of a mountain. That's where the name "Greene Mansion" came from. My solo guitar abilities are on a kindergarten level compared to him.

***Karnevel!* has a couple of pointed references to Ritchie Blackmore on "Sky Coaster" and "Bilge Rat." You've stated on many occasions that he was a hero of yours when you were growing up in Florida.**
Oh, yeah, for sure. No matter what kind of music you get into later in life, you still have those roots with you from the old days. And I'm glad I do, because I still love that music. In fact, we were listening to Led Zeppelin in the van today on the way to tonight's gig, and it was so much fun.

Meanwhile, in terms of the writing on *Karnevel!*, it seems you are combining the influences of Joe Zawinul and Wayne Shorter in a way that hasn't been done before on the guitar.
I mean, they're definitely two of my biggest influences. Wayne was such a brilliant player and has influenced so many composers. He's been my hero for as long as I can remember. And it's kind of funny, because most guitar players' heroes are other guitar players. My heroes are mostly sax players and keyboard players. Most of my favorite music doesn't even have a guitar in it.

It shows in the very intricate, very challenging compositions you wrote for this album.
Well, sometimes I wonder if it's a little too challenging. For some people, a lot of harmony can be too much. They hear it and they go, "What the hell's going on?" There's so much happening harmonically and they're not used to music that moves that fast through the changes. But once you listen to it, you acquire a taste for it.

I remember the first time I heard Wayne Shorter's [*1985 album*] *Atlantis*. I thought I liked it, but at the same time I was kind of confused because there was so much going on. But as I listened to it more, I grew to love it. Now it's one of my favorite records ever, and I hear every single chord change in it as definitely having to be there. And now I'm hoping that when people hear my music, even guys that listen more to classic rock or whatever, they'll hear the record and hopefully the harmony's not so ridiculously bizarre that they can't get used to it at some point and dig it.

Good luck with that!
[*laughs*] Well, you know what they say: "The more chords you write, the less money you make." So maybe I'm trying to go to the poorhouse on this one.

‘THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF OUR BAND IS TWO GUITARS’

Sleater-Kinney were making bass-less records long before the White Stripes and the Black Keys came along. Says co-leader **Carrie Brownstein**, “The power comes from the conversation the guitars are having with each other.”

BY JENNA SCARAMANGA

PHOTOGRAPHY BY KIMBERLEY ROSS

When Sleater-Kinney emerged amid the ’90s riot-grrrl movement, they stood out as a group of three young women making explosive records fueled by rage. The trio’s new effort, *Little Rope* (Loma Vista), is barely less explosive but fueled primarily by a different emotion: grief. Sleater-Kinney were midway through the songwriting process when guitarist Carrie Brownstein learned that her mother and stepfather had been killed in a car accident while on holiday in Italy.

On this new album, Brownstein and fellow guitarist/vocalist Corin Tucker manifest all the feelings of loss in sounds that range from thundering to delicate. Now 30 years into their career, Tucker’s monumental voice is more than equal to the task, and both guitarists wrestle their Gibsons into tones both caustic and vulnerable.

For some, grieving is a process of disappearing into yourself, but for Brownstein, *Little Rope* is exactly the opposite. “We just wanted to make something that felt extroverted, that felt lively, and that felt like it was going to be a container for these big emotions and sounds,” she says. “Usually our favorite records are something that’s going to bring people in and create an environment where there’s restlessness and urgency. Whether it was guitar tones or tempo, I think everything just had this energy to it.”

Little Rope carries off the feat of being melodic and aggressive at the same time, thanks to the interplay between Brownstein and Tucker’s guitar tones. “We were just getting tones that were really crunchy to layer underneath

prettier tones," Brownstein explains. "Two pedals that we really toyed with a lot were the Expandora [*fuzz*] and the Jangle Box [*compressor*]. I used a lot of chorus. I like putting a little harmonizer on things, or phase, but I like stacking that over something that is very corrosive.

"It's like, at the core of the song is just this vibrational distortion that's kind of breaking apart," she continues. "I feel like that creates an ambient world for the song. It has clarity in that you can still hear the notes. It's not just blown out, but it's atmospheric and immersive. And then on top of that, you can really stack melody and have that contrast between them. And so much of this album is about that contrast between something that's very harmonious and pretty, and something that's kind of dark and edgy. I think we were trying to build that tonally as well."

Despite the diversity of tones on show, Sleater-Kinney have not yet been tempted to the dark side of digital modeling. "I've messed around with modelers but I really like hearing a speaker," Brownstein says.

Brownstein and Tucker both rely on Fender amps as clean pedal platforms to build their tones. Tucker recorded *Little Rope* with a Fender Showman head that was stolen just after she finished tracking, while Brownstein prefers her '65 Deluxe Reverb reissue combo. "I think we also used a Super Reverb and a couple other things in the studio," Brownstein says. "But I love the Deluxe Reverb. I actually don't use a ton of reverb on it, but I just think it's a great amp. It handles effects well and it lets the guitar do most of the talking. Fender's really good at that. There's just a nice purity to it, but it's warm. And it doesn't squeeze anything. I like having enough headroom where you can really express the highs and lows and not get too bogged down by too much midrange. It's a good, dynamic amp."

That's where the Fender loyalty ends, however. Tucker's current preferred squeeze is a P90 Les Paul goldtop that Brownstein gave her as a 50th birthday present. Meanwhile, Brownstein's favorite Gibson is an opinion divider.

"WE LIKE HEAVY SOUNDS ON GUITAR, AND I LIKE TO BE ABLE TO GET THAT JUST FROM THE GUITAR"

"I mostly went back and played my 1972 SG on this album. Yes, it's from the controversial Norlin era. Some people say that's when Gibson got pretty inconsistent. I think that's true, but there are definitely Gibsons from that era that still sound great. I have an SG Special as well. I played a couple of different ones on this album. I just like how the tone is darker on an SG."

The pair sometimes get extra mileage from layering humbuckers with the P90 tones of Brownstein's Special or Tucker's goldtop. "They have different kinds of sustain. The tones just fit together nicely," Brownstein summarizes neatly. "I think when we're both still in the Gibson world, we just like the density of it. It's dark and thick, and to me it's just heavy. We like heavy sounds on guitar, and I like to be able to get that just from the guitar. Yes, I love pedals, but I do like the warm, heavy tone of a Gibson, no matter the pickup. I guess every once in a while they have something that's a little brighter, but for the most part Gibson is the dark arts of guitar."

While the White Stripes and the Black Keys are often credited with popularizing the rock band without a bassist, Sleater-Kinney were making bass-less records before those bands were known to even the most dedicated hipsters. Brownstein is modest about their role in developing that idea. "We came from a scene that really deconstructed the notion of what a conventional band looked like. In Olympia, Washington in the 1990s, there were so many avant-garde configurations of bands. There were bands that were just bass and drums; there were one guitar and a drummer, or just two guitarists. It was so common in this Pacific-Northwest scene to not have a bass, or to only have a bass, that it didn't feel conspicuous or even notable."

To compensate for that lack of low end, Sleater-Kinney tune to C♯ standard, and they also construct their guitar lines to work on their own. "It's the combination of amp, guitar tone and the detuning that naturally conjured the low

Carrie Brownstein (left) and Corin Tucker let their guitars do the talking in Sleater-Kinney.

Tucker's main guitar these days is a P90 Gibson Les Paul goldtop, while, Brownstein favors her 1972 SG "from the controversial Norlin era."

end. If not in a literal sense, it evoked it," Brownstein explains. "It's something we honed more and became more deliberate about once we realized we weren't just going to be putting out two records. But it just worked. We weren't overly concerned about the ways that it didn't conform to what a 'normal' band sounded like. The power didn't come from the low end; the power came from the way our guitars sounded together, from the sheer velocity of the songs. The power came from Corin's vocals and from the conversation the two guitars were having with each other."

Many traditional rock albums are built from the ground up, with drums and bass going down first, so the guitar tone has to fit around that foundation. For Sleater-Kinney, it's the reverse. "I wouldn't say bass is an afterthought, but the bass tone has to conform to the guitar," Brownstein observes. "The building blocks of our band is two guitars, with Corin sometimes playing something more akin to a bass line, but often not. We don't adhere to a specific rule in that way. If we're adding bass to a song in the studio, often we're dealing with sub bass that's just really there as the low-end rumble so it's not stepping on Corin's guitar line."

"EVERY TIME WE SPEAK, CRY, LAUGH HAS A DIFFERENT CHARACTERISTIC TO IT. I LIKE THINKING OF THE GUITAR LIKE THAT"

Brownstein builds her parts to sit on top of Tucker's foundation. "I'm the lead guitarist in Sleater-Kinney, but I'm not a shredder," she explains. "You can trick yourself into thinking virtuosity means playing really, really quickly. I think it's more about what you're saying than how much you're saying. Some of the best guitar lines are one-note leads or three-note leads. If they are perfectly placed, it doesn't matter. I think it's really important to just get away from this idea that you have to be garrulous with your playing."

Instead, Brownstein looks for unusual partial chord shapes to create interesting harmony. "I just love inverting things. I just add a weird suspended note, or something kind of minor or discordant. I often will start somewhere traditional, and then just reverse or invert it. Then it just has an edge to it. It gives it a character. I think I'm always looking for character in notes or riffs, especially something that moves it into a place that's a little more ineffable, a little more exciting."

For Sleater-Kinney, pressing against the limitations of their guitar-only format has forced them to find an individual sound. "I think having that kind of restriction placed upon you forces you to think about tone in a different way, to think about low end, to write differently," Brownstein says. "If you're emulating something, you think, We need all these ingredients, and that will add up to something that has force. But we found our force somewhere else. We weren't looking for a certain frequency; we were creating the frequency out of what was available to us. A lot of bands that have a unique sound create their own core."

"Finding the in-between with guitar, I think, is part of the charm," she muses. "There's so many options for shaping notes, for shaping chords. I love not quite knowing what someone's playing on guitar. Like, if I'm listening to someone else's song, thinking, That seems like this note, but they're doing something different with it.

"That, to me, is why guitar is so wonderful, so expressive. It emulates the human voice and human emotions so well. And I think of it like the ways that every time we speak, or every time we cry, every time we laugh as humans has a different characteristic to it. I like thinking of the guitar like that, too. That's why it's my favorite instrument. Just approaching it with that humanity and that openness can make for some really creative, innovative play."

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WILD SIDE

After **Lou Reed's *Berlin*** concept album bombed, guitarists Steve Hunter and Dick Wagner helped him get his groove back. The result was ***Rock 'n' Roll Animal***, the live classic that redeemed his spirit and saved his career.

BY GARY GRAFF

THE LATE LOU Reed took his walk on the wild side in 1972. But he didn't become an animal — a rock 'n' roll animal, to be specific — until the following year.

Recorded on December 21, 1973, before an audience at Howard Stein's Academy of Music in New York City, *Rock 'n' Roll Animal* was no mere stopgap or contract-fulfilling release. In its definitive performances and forceful renderings of the material, mostly from Reed's tenure with the Velvet Underground, it had all the conceptual integrity of a studio album. It documented an artist presenting his songs in a fresh manner, using the original versions as source material upon which to build and reinterpret, in this case with the help of an enormously potent band of genuinely animalistic caliber, led by guitarists Steve "The Deacon" Hunter and Dick Wagner.

And while the Allman Brothers Band's *At Fillmore East* and the Rolling Stones' *Get Yer Ya-Ya's Out* planted a flag for the live album as a legitimate artistic effort, *Rock 'n' Roll Animal* and its Gold-certified success certainly deserves some credit for a mid-'70s spike that included breakthrough live releases for Peter Frampton, Kiss, Cheap Trick, Lynyrd Skynyrd and others.

Rock 'n' Roll Animal was also something of a career saver for Reed. While his third solo album, *Berlin*, would eventually come to be regarded as a seminal song cycle/concept album, its unrelenting darkness did not connect with listeners at the time. His label, RCA Records, heard no potential in it — certainly not as a follow-up to the previous year's *Transformer* and its Top 20 hit, "Walk on the Wild Side" — and gave the record no support despite a *Rolling Stone* review declaring it "The *Sgt. Pepper* of the Seventies." *Berlin* was savaged by most critics, and even the burgeoning FM radio stations weren't about to play its songs about heroin addiction. Released on October 5, 1973, while Reed and the

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: The covers for *Berlin* (top) and *Rock 'n' Roll Animal*.

OPENING PAGE: Reed poses for the cover of 1975's *Lou Reed Live*, which features additional songs from the show captured on *Rock 'n' Roll Animal*.

Rock 'n' Roll Animal band were near the end of a European tour, *Berlin* peaked at number 98 on the *Billboard* 200, some 69 points lower than *Transformer*.

There had even been plans to stage *Berlin*, initially conceived as a double album, as a musical, but those went unrealized as well. "I had my thoughts that if RCA marketed *Berlin* and put a single-edge razor blade in the cellophane, it would probably have done better," cracks Steve Katz, the founding guitarist of the Blues Project and Blood, Sweat & Tears, whose brother Dennis was managing Reed at the time. It was this connection that would lead to Katz producing *Rock 'n' Roll Animal*.

"Lou and I had gotten friendly, and he was starting to rehearse for a tour," Katz recalls. "He said to me, 'What do you think I should do? *Berlin* is really a commercial bomb.' I said, 'What you ought to do is put a great live band together and do Velvet Underground songs and do it in a not heavy metal but hard rock kind of way. That way you'll get to the audience that hasn't been exposed to the Velvet Underground stuff.'

"He said, 'That's a great idea. Would you produce it?' 'Are you kidding? I would love to.' And we went from there."

So much of *Rock 'n' Roll Animal*'s success was about the band, which also included bassist Prakash John, drummer Pentti "Whitey" Glan and keyboardist Ray Colcord. But Hunter and Wagner were the stars of the show. They had been brought to Reed by producer Bob Ezrin for *Berlin*, where they joined such musical luminaries as Jack Bruce and Tony Levin on bass, David Bowie's Aynsley Dunbar and Procol Harum's B.J. Wilson on drums, Steve Winwood on organ, and brothers Michael and Randy Brecker on horns. Hunter and Wagner both boasted Midwest roots: An Illinois native, Hunter was part of Mitch Ryder's band Detroit, whose sole, self-titled album was produced by Ezrin and featured a hard-hitting reworked rendition of the Velvets' "Rock & Roll." Iowa-born Wagner established his reputation in southeastern Michigan with bands such as the Bossmen and the Frost, and later in New York with Ursa Major.

Ezrin used both players on Alice Cooper's 1973 album *Billion Dollar Babies*, and they'd become part

> "STEVE AND DICK WERE MY GO-TO GUITAR PLAYERS... WHATEVER I THOUGHT OF AND ASKED FOR, THEY COULD DO IT"

DAVID REDFERN/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE & OPPOSITE: Reed performs at the Crystal Palace Garden Party Festival, in London, September 15, 1973. Guitarist Dick Wagner can be seen to his right in both photos.

DAVID WARNER ELLIS/REDFERNS

of the *Welcome to My Nightmare* team after the original Cooper band broke up. They'd also be tapped as a kind of "fix it" team on Aerosmith's *Get Your Wings*, most notably playing guitar solos on the group's rendition of "Train Kept a Rollin'."

"They were my go-to guitar players for a bunch of stuff," Ezrin recalls. "Their versatility and their amazing, innate musicality… Whatever I thought of and asked for, they could do it. They were so adaptable, and very inventive. They were great collaborators. So it was natural to go to them for the *Berlin* record."

Hunter was the primary player for *Berlin*, in fact. "In many of the songs there was kind of a blues bed — it felt like a blues bed to me — and Steve was at that point my favorite blues player who was also a rock and roll player," Ezrin explains. "I knew there would be a lot of soloing and stuff, and Steve is a great soloist. Not to say that Dick isn't; he is, but [*Wagner's*] style and taste was more rock grandeur. That was very useful to me on some songs, but on other songs it didn't fit. So I had Steve on pretty much every track and Dick on certain tracks."

Though rocked by the initial failure of *Berlin* — and dealing with acknowledged substance-fueled PTSD from the experience — Ezrin was heartened to see Reed bring Hunter and Wagner into his touring band. "Having the two of them together was perfect," he says. "They covered all the bases." For Hunter, meanwhile, it was a chance to get to know Wagner, who, despite their Detroit roots and many common colleagues, he'd "only met kinda briefly, maybe a year before," he says, having recorded separately on *Billion Dollar Babies* and *Berlin*.

Wagner — who passed away during 2014 at the age of 71 — said some years later, "It was pretty easy playing with Steve. I didn't really know him well before [*the Reed tour*], but I knew who he was. And when we got in a room it was really easy to play together. There wasn't a lot of talking or planning; we just started playing and fell in very naturally with each other."

Via Zoom from Spain, where he now resides, Hunter adds, "I really got to know Dick and work with him more on that tour, which wasn't really called the *Berlin* tour; it was just a Lou Reed tour. The first six, seven days of rehearsal we never even saw Lou. We got a list of songs he wanted to play and, of course, tapes and stuff to learn the songs."

Working parts out with Wagner was easy, Hunter explains. "When Dick and I started working, honest to God, it didn't take a lot of work. I would play one thing and he would play the opposite or something else that fit. A lot of the arrangement ideas were Dick's. He was good at that sort of thing and could work things out really quickly. There were lines we played in harmony, of course. We worked those out, and we made sure we both played the same number of solos. There wasn't much else to work out, really."

For that matter, the entire band seemed a perfect fit. "When we got together and played for the first time in rehearsal," Hunter says, "you could sense, 'Oh, wow, this can be a really powerful band. These are all great players. This is gonna be a lot of fun.' You sort of noticed that right off the bat. Lou's material is so powerful, as everybody knows, and I think we felt our job was to make that power and angst come out of the music so that Lou could ride on top of it. We really wanted to make it just slam. That was our goal from the beginning."

The group worked on its own for most of the rehearsal process, Hunter says, with Reed coming in "when we reached a point where we thought we were ready for Lou to hear us. He came in and sang each of the songs to get a feel. That only took a couple of days, and then we were on the road." Katz had become friendly with Wagner when the guitarist auditioned for to be the lead singer with Blood, Sweat & Tears, a role that was awarded to David Clayton-Thomas. He was well aware of the potential for both the band and the Hunter-Wagner team.

> "OUR JOB WAS TO MAKE THAT POWER AND ANGST COME OUT OF THE MUSIC SO THAT LOU COULD RIDE ON TOP OF IT"

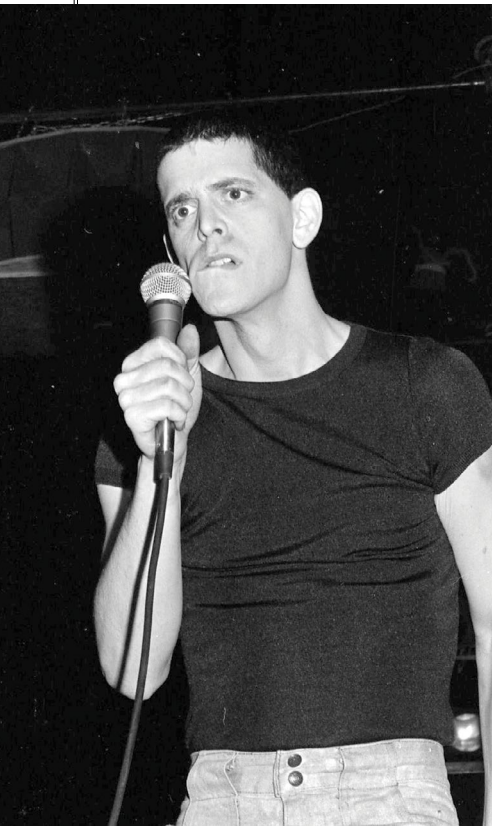
"They were great," he says. "I think what made them so good is they were really great Les Paul players. If you're a guitar player, you know what I mean. The Les Pauls have sustain and midrange, and that worked really well for the songs they were playing with Lou."

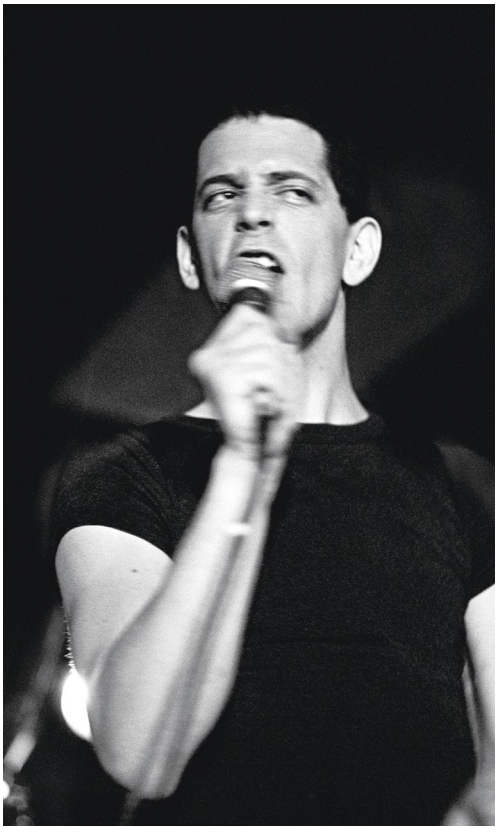
There was a story behind Hunter's 1959 Les Paul TV Special, however. His Gibson SG and Ezrin's Martin acoustic were stolen from the Record Plant in New York City while the two were on a dinner break during the *Berlin* sessions. "Someone had finagled their way in and said, 'I'm here to pick up a couple guitars,'" Hunter recalls. "Someone let 'em in and they picked up our guitars and walked out." The studio's insurance paid for new instruments, and Hunter found his replacement at a store in midtown Manhattan. "It was terrifically ugly, but in a good way," he says with a laugh. "It was real ugly yellow. It had one pickup, a P90. I plugged it into a Bassman and played it and just fell in love with it immediately. I had the cash from the insurance and just bought it on the spot. I loved playing it and used it till the neck broke, unfortunately, which was common with a lot of those Les Pauls."

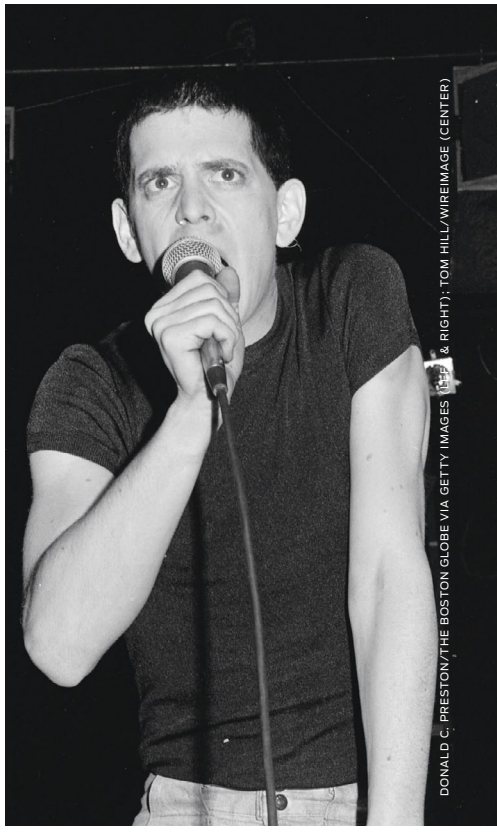
For the tour rig, Hunter plugged into a 50-watt Hiwatt amplifier with a 4x12 cabinet, and went light on effects, using just an MXR Phase 90 pedal. "Somewhere along the line I picked up an Echoplex, but there were no distortion pedals or anything like that," Hunter says. "I don't like them. I didn't use any kind of booster pedals or fuzz or anything like that. Didn't need 'em."

Reed's shows during the fall and early winter of 1973 featured plenty of *Berlin* — up to five songs each night, including at the shows recorded for *Rock 'n' Roll Animal*. But arguably the most memorable and signature piece of each performance was the instrumental introduction Hunter composed to open the show, a majestic three minutes and 20 seconds that wove together elements of blues, jazz, prog and even southern rock into an overture that morphed into the VU's "Sweet Jane." (Its presence on *Rock 'n' Roll Animal* marked the only time to date Reed had granted another writer a co-writing credit.)

Hunter had started working on the piece a few years before during his time with Ryder and Detroit. "I never got very far and kept putting it on the back burner. I almost threw it away a couple times," he

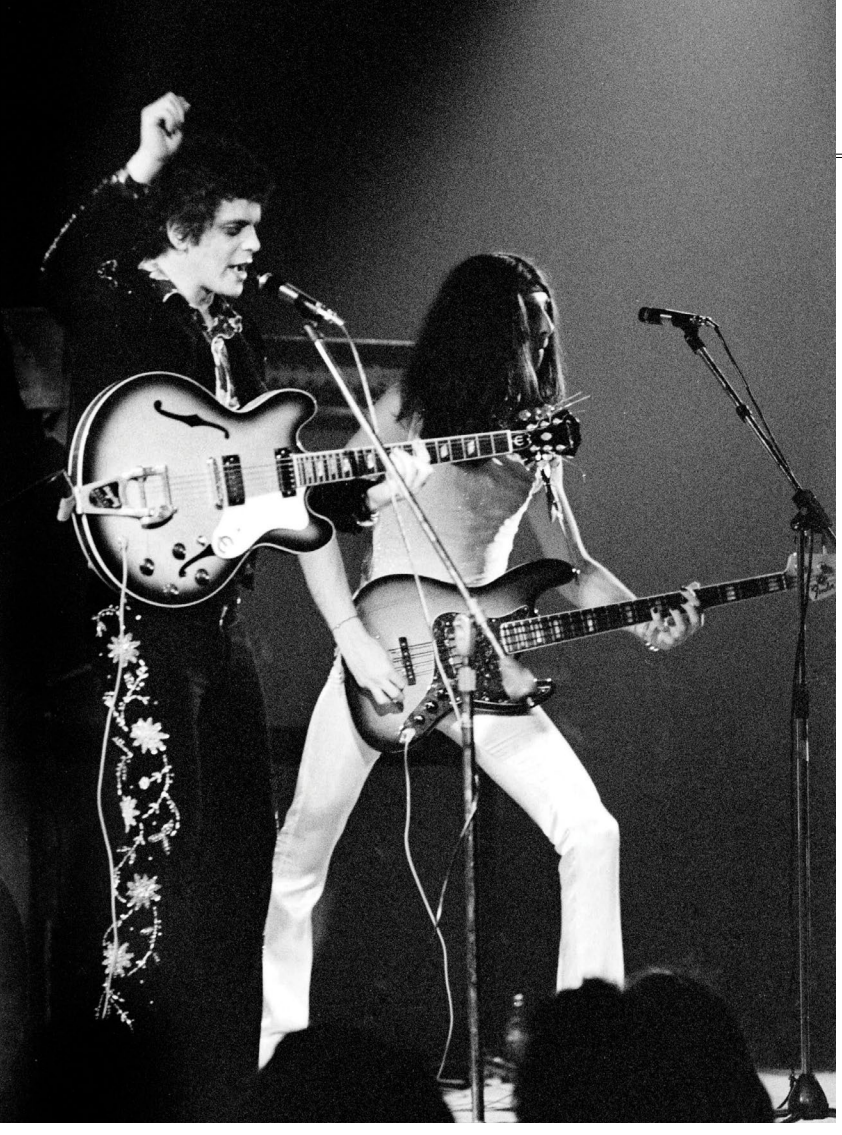






Reed, thinner and with close-cropped hair, performs in the U.S. following the 1973 tour's European leg.

DONALD C. PRESTON/THE BOSTON GLOBE VIA GETTY IMAGES (LEFT & RIGHT); TOM HILL/WIREIMAGE (CENTER)



Onstage at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam with (clockwise from left) Prakash John, Steve Hunter and Wagner, September 1973.

GIJSBERT HANEKROOT (LEFT & TOP RIGHT); JORGEN ANGEL/REDFERNS (BOTTOM RIGHT)

says. He built it to a point where he could use it during a short tenure touring with the Chambers Brothers, but even then Hunter says, "it was still going through changes. I thought it was just an exercise or something, maybe, and again I put it on the shelf and forgot about it." He returned to it again during rehearsals for the Reed tour, when it was suggested that some type of instrumental introduction to bring Reed onstage would be useful.

"We played around with some things," Hunter recalls, "and I happened to say to Dick, 'I've got this piece. Maybe we can jam to it. I've got parts for it, melody and things. See what you think.' I showed it to the band and we played it down and it sounded fabulous, the best it ever sounded. When these guys played it, it sounded amazing. I tried playing it after that and it never sounded that good.

"When we toured in Europe it ended up being the intro to 'Vicious,' 'cause Lou wanted to start the show with that. 'Vicious' was in E minor, which fit, because my intro ends on B major. When we came to America he wanted to open with 'Sweet Jane.' And 'Sweet Jane' was in E, so it all worked."

When Katz heard what the band was doing, he knew it was gold. "'Sweet Jane' was already this incredible song [*Reed*] had written, and thanks to Steve Hunter and Dick Wagner it became a classic," Katz notes. "That overture really set up the whole album, and I think that's exactly what I wanted to hear — the band taking these songs and doing a different slant on them with the guy who actually wrote them."

Kevin Hearn of Barenaked Ladies, who was part of Reed's later bands from 2007 on — including one lineup with Hunter — says Reed remained fond of the "Sweet Jane" introduction and even put it back into his concerts, as an encore, at the suggestion of his other musicians. "Lou really loved that idea," Hearn says. "It's not something he considered a relic of the past or anything like that. He very much enjoyed it, and we worked on it in rehearsals."

Hunter, however, was strong-armed into surrendering his composing rights for the U.S. edition of the album and would not receive any songwriting royalties for his "Intro" until 2011, even though he had been part of Reed's *Berlin* Live Tour, playing the entire album during 2007 and 2008.

The 1973 tour was initially a rough-and-tumble affair, during which Reed performed with his face painted white. Addled by drugs and personal issues — he had divorced his first wife, Bettye Kronstad, that fall after just months of marriage — the singer

delivered performances that "were either brilliant or terrible, depending on how stoned he was," according to biographer Victor Bockris. Reed hit bottom in Brussels when he left the stage after just a half hour, causing a riot at the venue. Afterward, he maintained his composure, even reportedly decreasing his substance intake, and was in more consistent form when the group returned to the U.S.

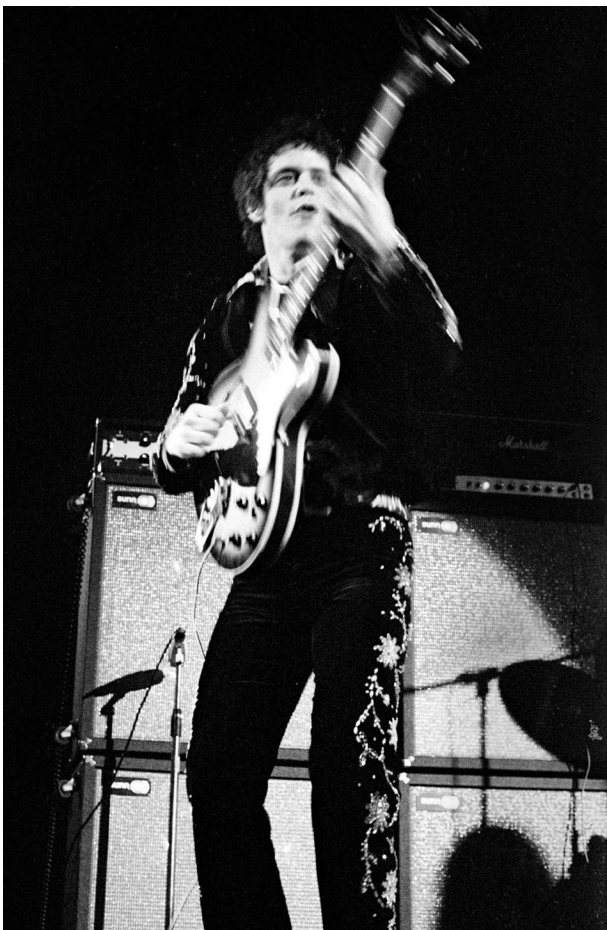
> "LOU WAS ACTUALLY MORE FUN TO BE WITH WHEN HE WAS TAKING SPEED. WHEN HE WAS COMING DOWN HE WAS IMPOSSIBLE"

Nevertheless, Hunter contends that "working on stage with him, [*Reed*] was a pro. I never felt uncomfortable onstage at any one time, ever, with Lou. Ever. He's an artist, and you just get used to the way that he performs. You just adapt to it. That's what you're supposed to do." Katz, however, feels "there were two Lous. When we first met, he wasn't on drugs that much. By the time *Rock 'n' Roll Animal* came around, Lou would either be on speed or coming down from it. He was actually more fun to be with when he was taking speed. When he was coming down, he was impossible."

Reed's two concerts at Brooklyn's Academy of Music followed the set list the group had established, consisting of mostly solo material from *Transformer* and *Berlin* plus five Velvet Underground covers. He did, however, surprise his stateside fans with a new look. Having begun the tour with bushy hair, he'd cropped it shortly before arriving in the U.S. He also began wearing black mascara and lipstick, and studded S&M-style wristbands.

"I thought it was ridiculous," Katz remembers. "He comes out looking like a speed freak and dressing like a speed freak and acting like a speed freak. Thank God the album didn't come out as a video." Katz also recalls that "Lou's singing wasn't that great" but it was honest, and the band mitigated any number of shortcomings.

"Because the band was so good, Lou could be however he was, and it would make sense," says Katz, who listened from the Record Plant's mobile recording truck. "He's the guy that wrote all this stuff, so how his voice sounds doesn't make much



On the 1973 tour, Reed alternated between singing and performing with his Epiphone Riviera with Bigsby, which he played while he was in the Velvet Underground. The guitar was also featured on the cover of 1972's *Transformer*.

Hunter and Reed perform *Berlin* at the Terral Festival in Malaga, Spain, July 21, 2008.

of a difference. The trick was to make sure his persona came through, along with the band."

The recording itself was smooth, save for a malfunctioning audience microphone that forced Katz and the engineers to fill in applause and cheers from an unlikely recording. "We were at RCA Studios, and our engineer [*Gus Mossler*] went next door to the archive room and pulled out an audience track, the first one he found. I said, 'Oh, this is great. What is it?' He said, 'It's from a John Denver concert.' I laughed my sides off, and we put it in. I never told Lou."

Because RCA was in a hurry to recoup after *Berlin*'s failure, it green-lighted a single-disc album, even though the show had enough material for a double LP. With just five tracks, *Rock 'n' Roll Animal* concentrated on the VU songs that were Katz's focus in the first place, along with the 13-minute-plus opus of "Heroin" and a similarly epic 10:15 treatment of "Rock 'n' Roll" as standouts alongside "Sweet Jane." "Lady Day" was the only *Berlin* track included on the album, although a CD reissue from 2000 added "Caroline Says I" and "How Do You Think It Feels." More songs from the shows came out two years later on *Lou Reed Live*, which Katz also produced along with Reed's next studio album, *Sally Can't Dance*, in 1974. Going through his own divorce at the time, Katz surrendered his royalties for both of the live sets, which he now calls "probably the stupidest thing I've ever done in my life."

In the end, *Rock 'n' Roll Animal* was as triumphant as *Berlin* was disappointing. It hit number 45 on the *Billboard* 200 and became Reed's first Gold album. The reviews were largely positive: *Rolling Stone* declared it "very fine" and "a record to be played loud," while the *Village Voice*'s Robert Christgau called it "a live album with a reason for living." There were contrary opinions: A pre-Pretenders Chrissie Hynde castigated Reed's appearance in a review for Britain's *New Musical Express* — the publication that retrospectively took Reed to task in 1979 for "wrecking the rare beauty and affirmation of his greatest songs by turning them into cliché-ridden hack heavy metal mutations."

Fifty years on, however, *Rock 'n' Roll Animal* is roundly considered in a kind light. Even *Berlin* has enjoyed reconsideration as part of a golden, if provocative era — as if there were any other kind in Reed's lengthy career.

"I loved it," Ezrin says of *Rock 'n' Roll Animal*. "I was so happy and proud that people I admired, enjoyed working with and had such deep affection for found each other and did this work. I thought it was — and still do think — it's amazing."

(THIS PAGE) JORDI VIDAL/REDFERNS ; (OPPOSITE) GUS STEWART/GETTY IMAGES (LEFT)

npr

UNCOMMON FOLK

He grew up in a folk music haven. As he celebrates his latest album, *Wide Open Light*, **Ben Harper** shares sights and memories of his childhood home.

BY JIMMY LESLIE

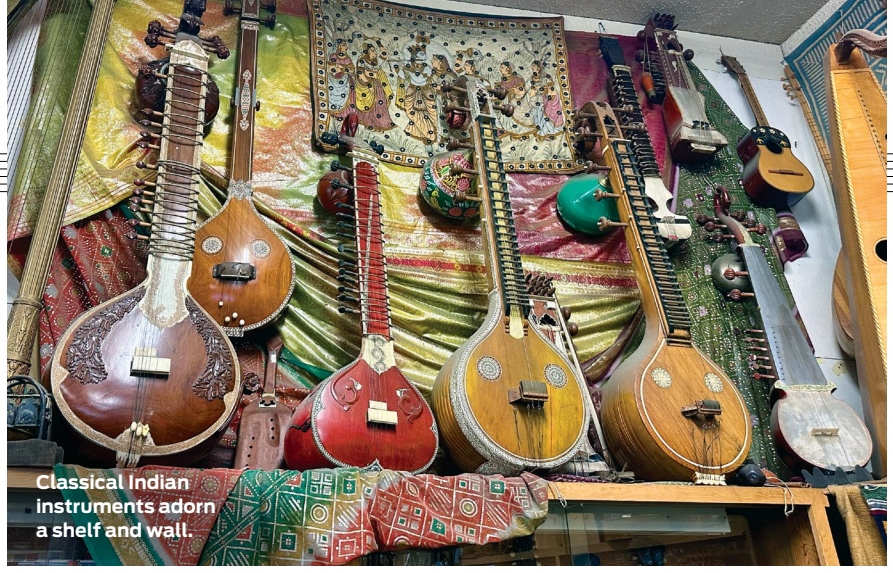
Ben Harper and his mother, Ellen, in their family-owned Folk Music Center, June 5, 2014.

GINA FERAZZI/LOS ANGELES TIMES VIA GETTY IMAGES (ELLEN & BEN)

"**AT FIRST, I** thought every kid had a music store in their family," Ben Harper recalls. "But I realized when I was young that this place was called the Folk Music Center because it was the center of something special. Not every grandmother can play the entire Pete Seeger catalog on autoharp, dulcimer and guitar."

Yale Avenue in the heart of Claremont, California, has a timeless college town quality, with shops that have been there for decades. Founded by Harper's grandparents, Charles and Dorothy Chase, the Folk Music Center is in its 66th year of operation very near to its original location. Entering the storefront is like stepping into a time machine and landing in the late '60s to early '70s. The walls bear posters for the Claremont Folk Music Festival they presented, as well as the Golden Ring, the venue they ran from 1965 to 1970, which hosted icons like Doc Watson, John Fahey, Reverend Gary Davis, and Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee. Acoustic instruments from around the world adorn every corner, and some truly historic examples sit behind glass in the museum area established in 1976.

But the Folk Music Center isn't all about the past. It also offers plenty of new instruments on its racks, alongside the vintage models. None of it is very pricey. Kids come in for gear, lessons and repairs, and there's a stage where the staff hosts open mic nights and other performances every week. The Folk Music Center has always catered to real players, social activists and passionate performers.



Classical Indian instruments adorn a shelf and wall.

With son C.J. and daughter Harris, who plays the '50s Martin 00-18 that Harper used on Harry Styles' "Boyfriends"track.

"My grandmother could sing as beautifully as any sound you've ever heard in your life," Harper says. "She was the musical spark in the family. She knew the Seegers and the Guthries. My mom inherited that perfect folk voice. She hung out with Hendrix and was getting attention for her chops and songs. But my grandparents needed her here, because she intimately understands this business."

Ellen Harper is still the one at the front counter when you walk in, asking nicely if she can help you find anything. You can hear her singing voice on the album she did with Ben in 2013, *Childhood Home*, and read all about the family history in her fascinating 2021 book, *Always a Song: Singers, Songwriters, Sinners & Saints*. Ben's R&B-flavored 2022 album, *Bloodline Maintenance*, is an homage to his percussionist father, Leonard, and his brothers Joel and Peter are musicians who maintain a significant presence at the Center. Ellen is down to earth and doesn't mince words. In between ringing up sales at the register and helping a youngster figure out the fixes his axe needs, she takes time to offer real-world insights about running a historic shop in the modern marketplace. On the day I visited, she was joined behind the counter by her granddaughter, who was fingerpicking "Dust in the Wind."

It was in Ellen's office that Harper sat down to discuss the Folk Music Center and his latest album, the acoustic *Wide Open Light* (Chrysalis), which is like a bookend to the album that put him on the map, *Welcome to the Cruel World*. And as he presented tales about growing up in this down-home musical environment, it was fascinating to think how it all led to his Grammy-winning career.

Did you always embrace your family heritage, or were you a rebel?

I embraced it from the beginning, but when teenage years hit I was gone, out in the streets. The music was glorious. The late '80s and early '90s was the gilded golden age of hip-hop, but I was a player. So, fortunately, I was able to find my way back to the music that was always kicking around my head as a kid while I was striving to create myself.

You went on to rock out, but it's interesting how your 1994 debut album was a folk record, as if it was always sitting there waiting to come out.

It was only sitting there because of being raised in here. When you spend a certain amount of time in an environment like this, it becomes you in a special way. And I've had the privilege of watching so many incredible musicians, known and unknown, come in here and put on amazing personal performances, right up to this very day.

David Lindley lived nearby and is probably the most famous cat for hanging around in here. He lit your fire for Hawaiian lap steel, correct?

Yes. David would come in here all the time and play the Weissenborns. That was my inspiration. I had heard everybody come in here and play everything, but when I heard Lindley play the Weissenborns, I went, "That's the most incredible thing I've ever heard in my entire life! There's no way I'm not going to try my hand at it." My grandfather sold Lindley his first Weissenborn.

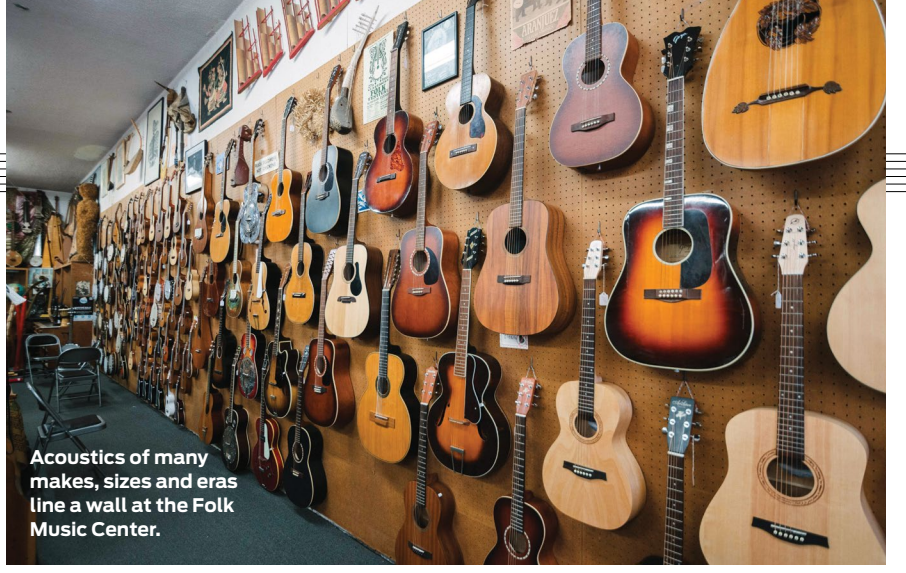
It's so cool to be surrounded by exotic world instruments, and if there was one guy that could probably play everything...

It was him.

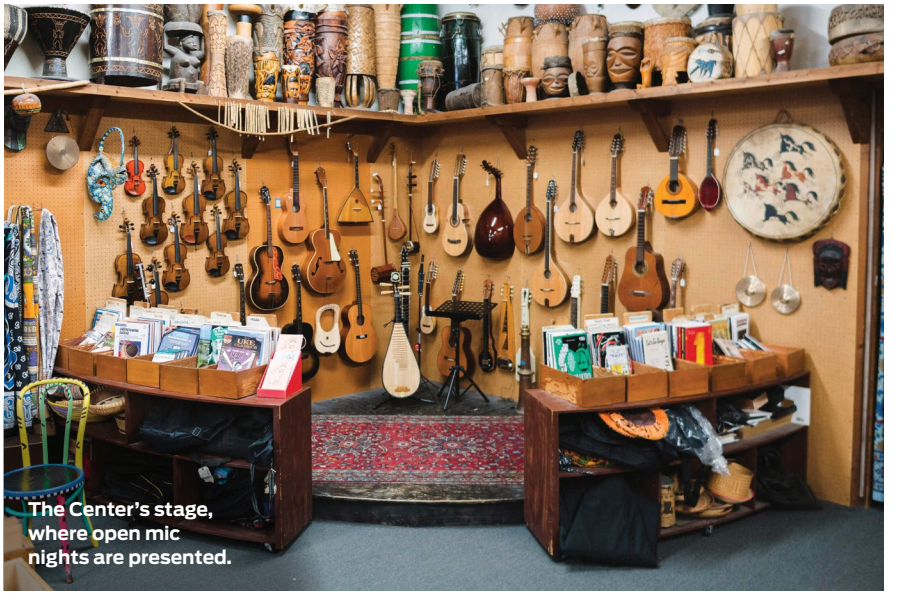
How about you?

David could transform the room on all of it. I can probably transform about three or four minutes on a lot of stuff, like oud and saz and some Indian stuff. But David was different. He mastered them all. He put in 10,000 hours on all of them. I played to my strengths. I put 10,000 in on the lap steel and on writing songs. That was my shit. And then I was off touring quickly.

MATHIEU BITTON (LIVE)



Acoustics of many makes, sizes and eras line a wall at the Folk Music Center.



The Center's stage, where open mic nights are presented.

A 1903 Martin with rosewood back and sides and ivory pegs.

"MY MOM INHERITED THAT PERFECT FOLK VOICE. SHE HUNG OUT WITH HENDRIX AND GOT ATTENTION FOR HER CHOPS AND SONGS"

Taj Mahal is another otherworldly maestro of instruments from around the globe, and he told me a funny story. He'd been flown in to play the Claremont Folk Festival and was upstairs trying to get some sleep when he heard you playing lap steel with your friends down here, loud enough to make sure he could hear it up there. He was impressed enough to come see, and there you were on the Weissenborn. Is that the way you recall meeting him as well?

Yeah, that's how it happened. I had been going to see Taj since I was a kid. Any time he was within a hundred miles, we'd go as a family, like a pilgrimage. We'd close the shop early and go.

The connections between your family, the legendary players and the instruments are incredible. Would you detail the story about selling the Pete Seeger/Woody Guthrie guitar?

Pete and my grandparents were family friends. A guitar wandered into the shop. It was a Martin that had been cut in a way that doesn't even make sense. It had been sawed, well, straight down the middle.

Like a sandwich?

Yes. Someone had opened it up and placed tongue depressors inside to space it out, as an experiment to see what it would sound like.

So the guitar wanders into the shop, and my grandfather's first thought is, What a shame, you've ruined a great Martin! It was a double-0 or a triple-0. My grandfather buys it for a nominal fee, because it's damaged goods. He hangs it on the wall, and it sits there for a year, two years. Finally, someone makes an offer and my grandfather says, "Good riddance, get it out of here."

Pete Seeger comes in looking for Martins, and my grandfather says, "Funny, we just had a Martin in here." He gave him the description. Seeger says, "Was that a double-0 or triple-0, lined with tongue depressors all the way around to hold it together?" My grandfather says, "Yeah." Pete says, "That was Woody Guthrie's guitar. Woody and I did that in his shed." [*laughs*]

Oh no!

Yes. And my grandfather called the guy to say, "Hey, we need that guitar back."

But by then — and this is odd because it's not really what you do — the guy who bought it said, "Well, sorry. I just called Martin." He had already found out because Martin had registered it as Woody's. He knew what he had.

That guitar should be in the Martin Museum. Whatever happened to it?
It should be somewhere like that. I suppose it would be in our museum here if it was still around.

How did your deep connection to the Folk Music Center inspire *Wide Open Light*?
I wanted *Wide Open Light* to feel like you walked into this place and heard me playing guitar. I wanted to make a record that was stripped down. I didn't want the perfect sound; I wanted the perfect take. I tried to keep it raw and bare-bones. A song is enough. Not to take anything away from modern production, but we've had a hundred years of it, and I thought it was time to go anti-production. I knew this would be an intimate record, and I wanted to bookend it with acoustic instrumentals, which I've been doing since day one. Taj Mahal and David Lindley would transport you by improvising acoustically for 10 minutes, and then start singing a song. I feel it's important to keep that instrumental flame burning.

Let's talk about some songs from the new album. Tell me about "Heart and Crown."
The opener is technically influenced by John Fahey. I play it in an open A tuning on a Fraulini made by Todd Cambio in Wisconsin. He's taken the canon of 1920-to-1930 American instruments and perfected them with an obsession that you rarely see. The guitar that he's expanded upon here is a Lead Belly–style Stella 12-string. You could spend a lifetime just perfecting the purfling. He makes everything himself, and what he can't do, like the tailpiece, is nickel silver machined in Germany. He leaves no stone unturned.

How about "Giving Ghosts"?
That's a live take that I couldn't beat. It's played on solo acoustic Weissenborn recorded at the Sydney Opera House on the day I wrote it in 2014. I've recorded it in numerous studios, but I wasn't going to put it on a record until I could beat that. Finally, I surrendered and used the live take. I went "Needle and the Damage Done" on it.

"Masterpiece"
I wrote that for Rickie Lee Jones, and she did her version turned upside down and on its ear for an album I produced [*2012's* The Devil You Know], but I always wanted to do my own version. I realized this is where my version belongs and recorded it on a Taylor Builder's Edition 517e WHB dread-nought sunburst. The tone is as if a Martin D-18 and a Gibson J-45 had a kid. I feel so head over heels that I used it for every round-neck acoustic part on the new album.

"Yard Sale" features Jack Johnson. What's the story there?
Jack is playing slack-key acoustic — I'm not sure of his tuning — on a Cole Clark Fat Lady. Mike Valero from the L.A. Philharmonic is on upright bass, and I'm playing my Asher lap steel with a ton of reverb on it in the background. When we play live, Jack plays a slack key solo. On the recording, I took the liberty of overdubbing a solo on a Style

Says Harper of his Weissenborn Style 4, "I've got the only roundneck made of Brazilian rosewood."

"DAVID LINDLEY WOULD COME IN HERE ALL THE TIME AND PLAY THE WEISSENBORNS. THAT WAS MY INSPIRATION"

This Grunewald is one of the oldest known 12-string guitars.

A circa 1800 Stauffer, one of the earliest examples of the make.

ANDY LUND

4 Weissenborn. That was my first Weissenborn, and it's my main one in Style 4. I take the first four bars and then Jack takes the next four.

"Trying Not to Fall in Love With You."
This is the centerpiece of the record. Yes, that's me playing the piano. I'm like a 10-trick pony in terms of instruments I can play well enough to record something today, and that is the piano Carole King played on *Tapestry*. They still have it at A&M Studios, and I knew that because of Harry Styles.

Harry called to see if I could go in there and contribute guitar on a song for *Harry's House* [2022] that was not going down without a fight called "Boyfriends." Different guitar players had thrown ideas at it, but nothing stuck. He called me up to come have a take, like Steely Dan–style, where they'd call up players to take a swing at a solo. So I was like, "Oh shit." [*laughs*]

What was cool about Harry is he said, "Hey, by the way, you know that acoustic guitar you had on your first few records. It sounds like a Martin." That's why he's where he is — because he really knows. "Can you bring that guitar?" I told him absolutely, but I had given that guitar to my daughter, and she had taken it to school with her in New York. Then I realized that she happened to be home on holiday. She wouldn't leave that guitar in her dorm. Did she bring it? Yes!

I had been playing Harry Styles when he was in One Direction and giving her tacks to put up their posters. But I didn't tell her why I wanted her guitar, because I didn't know if I was going to make the track. But she grilled me, and when I told her it was big, she intuitively knew, because that's her guy. She fell on the floor — *boom!* And I ended up making the track. That mahogany Martin 00-18 from the '50s that I played on "Walk Away," "Waiting on an Angel" and "Another Lonely Day" is the guitar I played on Harry Styles' "Boyfriends."

And lastly, "Thank You, Pat Brayer"
Pat is a legend around here in this region called the Inland Empire, and he is one of the best living songwriters. He gave me my first gig and strongly believed that promoting music from this region was the most important thing in the world. I just wanted to shout him out on this closing instrumental featuring the mandocello, which is like a freaking foghorn with strings. It's the most haunting, spooky, coursed-stringed instrument in existence.

While I do believe that the album is enough, and everybody is going to stake their own claim in the artform, I'm also a firm believer that there's got to be somewhere else to go to expand the long-play medium. There are so many bad-asses that come through this music store every day, whether they play sitar, tabla, doumbek, oud, sarod, sarangi, hurdy-gurdy, and on and on. I'd like to utilize a day in this music store to make a record: Set up a recording rig with a great engineer and record the day as people come in and out. I'd capture it on video too, to mirror the experience.

INTO THE GROOVE

As she relentlessly brings the funk, **Ella Feingold** is all about her rhythm chops.

BY JEFF JACOBSON

PRINCE SLYLY TOLD her she was "too funky." Bruno Mars sent her one of his signature Fender Strats, and Bootsy Collins and Ray Parker Jr. left glowing comments on her Instagram posts. Guitarists are usually lauded for their soloing prowess, but Ella Feingold doesn't solo — she doesn't feel the need. Instead, she weaves magic with her rhythm playing, creating a unique and soulful blend of classic and forward-looking funk guitar that's fueled by her uncanny sense of time.

In 2022, Feingold received a Grammy participation certificate for her playing on the Record of the Year winner, "Leave the Door Open," by Silk Sonic, the R&B duo featuring Mars and singer/rapper Anderson .Paak. At the time that Mars invited her to perform on their album, *An Evening With Silk Sonic* (which won four Grammys that year), Feingold had already made a name for herself playing with artists such as Queen Latifah and Erykah Badu. But participating in the project was key to her making it through a challenging period of her life, during which she hadn't touched her guitar in five years. As we'll see, there's more to the story. But first, let's check out some of Ella's playing.

For this lesson, we'll be selecting from Feingold's funky trove of Instagram reels (@ella_rae_feingold), which will also appear in the online version of this lesson on guitarplayer.com. **Ex. 1** is one of her chill single-note grooves. (The time stamp indicates when the example begins in the corresponding video.) Note how she creates many interesting musical twists and turns while using just one chord, B♭9. The Godfather of Soul, James Brown, was a master of conceiving one-chord grooves and was a major influence on Feingold's playing. Her use of deadened notes (indicated with *X*s) is elemental to funk playing, as they percussively propel the music along, much as a drummer would.

As it happens, this line of thinking is essential to Feingold's overall approach. "I don't look at my instrument as a guitar; I look at it as pitched percussion or a drum," she explains. To deaden notes, simply lift your finger so that it lightly rests on the string, creating a percussive sound when picked. Also contributing to this effect is the guitarist's use of *palm-muting* (P.M.), which is performed by lightly resting the pick hand on the bridge, lending an additional muffle to the note attack. The sliding trill in bar 1 is really meant to function more as a vibrato; quickly shimmy your fret-hand index finger back and forth between the 6th and 7th frets. You can substitute a traditional vibrato if you'd like, but the "trill vibrato" adds a unique spice here. To seamlessly play the high B♭ note that follows, fret it with the base of your index finger, as if creating a barre. Note that Feingold demonstrates the example slowly at 0:35 in the video.

Now 43, Feingold began her career as a working guitarist while a high school sophomore in Swampscott, Massachusetts in the late '90s. "It'd be a Monday night, and I'm supposed to be doing homework, but I'm out playing a club gig," she recalls. In 2002, after finishing high school, she started her first year at Berklee College of Music,

PHOTO COURTESY OF ELLA FEINGOLD

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For audio and video of this lesson, go to **guitarplayer.com/june24-lesson**

before dropping out during finals week to take advantage of a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to study privately with Chalmers "Spanky" Alford, the enormously influential jazz, gospel and neo-soul guitarist, whom she calls "my favorite musician in the world." Feingold discovered he was teaching at a music store in Alabama, and they would play guitar for each other over the phone. After a few conversations, Alford invited her to his home to spend the week hanging out and playing guitar together. "He had a very unique way of playing the instrument," she recalls. "So I just practiced the things that he showed me, and when I got home to Boston, I was a completely different musician."

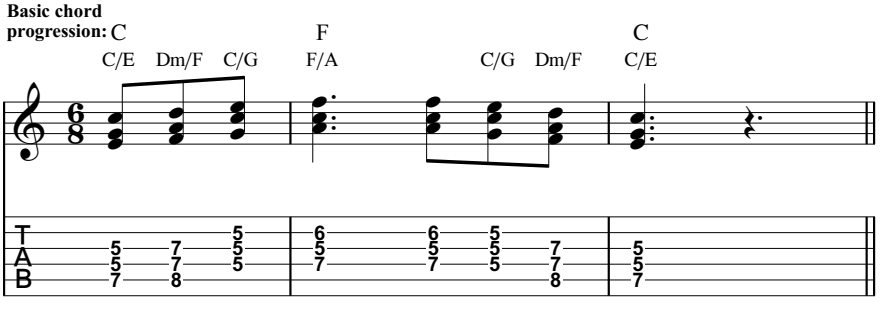
Feingold's love for Alford's style is a major contributor to her sound. During our conversation, she demonstrated one of his unique contributions, which was to incorporate Joe Pass–style jazz voicings with gospel and neo-soul guitar playing. **Ex. 2a** demonstrates a standard gospel-style approach using a simple progression in the key of C major, moving from the I (one) chord, C, to the IV (four), F, and back. **Ex. 2b**, however, presents a more colorful path that "Spanky" might have taken, employing jazz voice leading by adding diminished 7 and major 6/9 chords. Feingold's deep chordal knowledge and ability to draw from a plethora of different voicings is one hallmark of her playing.

Feingold believes Alford is part of the reason she shares so much about herself and her music online. "He taught me so much about musical generosity and generosity as a person," she says. Just about every day on her Instagram, Feingold presents bite-sized musical concepts that guitarists can quickly incorporate into their own playing, all while demonstrating a wide variety of approaches to rhythm guitar.

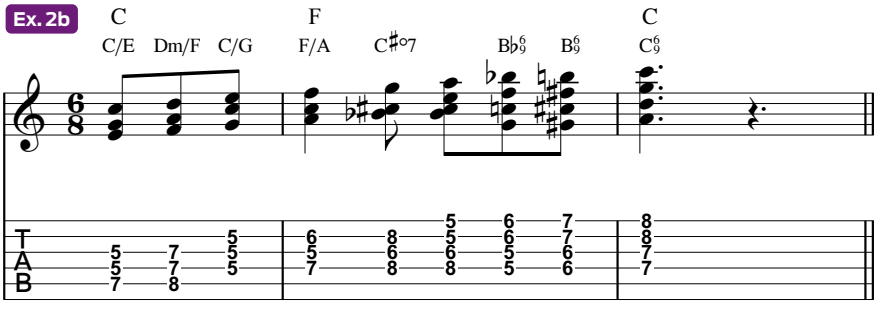
Ex. 3 is a James Brown–esque groove featuring some "chicken scratch," the rhythmic strumming of deadened strings associated with another of Feingold's idols, guitarist Jimmy "Chank" Nolen, who was a mainstay of James Brown's band in the '60s and '70s. The *dyad* (two-note chord) on the downbeat of bar 1

Ex. 1

Ex. 2a



Ex. 2b



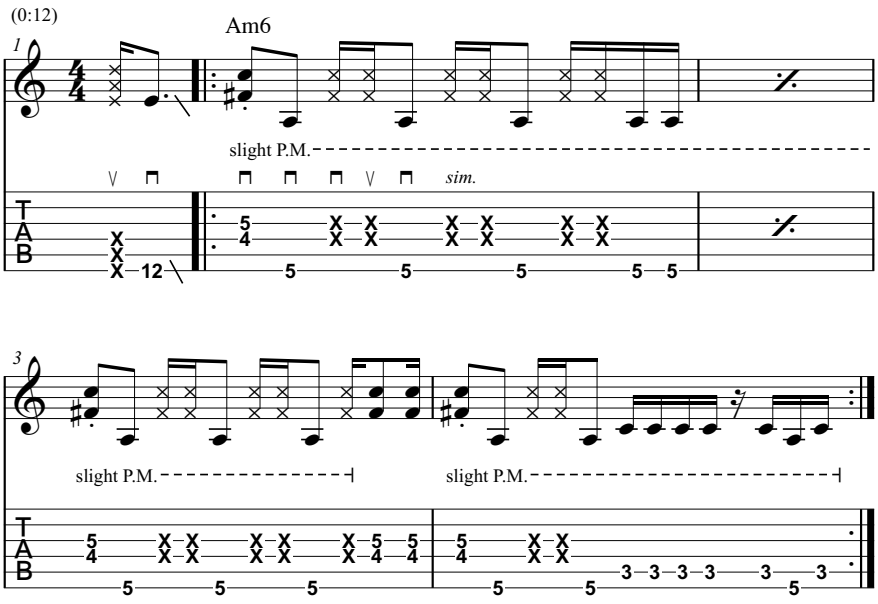
illustrates the old adage "Little things mean a lot." The small black dot under the note heads here indicates *staccato* articulation — technically 50 percent of the note's normal duration. Feingold employs a light palm mute with her pick hand, which shortens the chord's duration, but here it's not quite enough. After sounding the notes, quickly loosen your fret hand's grip on the strings so that they break contact with the frets, but without letting go of the strings. If you were to play the example *tenuto* — that is, with normal, non-staccato note durations — it would lack the desired funkiness and wouldn't groove with the same *oomph*.

In 2005, musical director Rickey Minor (*The Tonight Show, American Idol*) tapped Feingold to play guitar in Queen Latifah's band for that year's Sugar Water Festival tour, which featured a host of major artists, including Erykah Badu and Jill Scott. The guitarist made valuable connections that summer and later worked extensively with Badu. It also led to her auditioning for Prince at his home over two nights, when he gave her the aforementioned kudos.

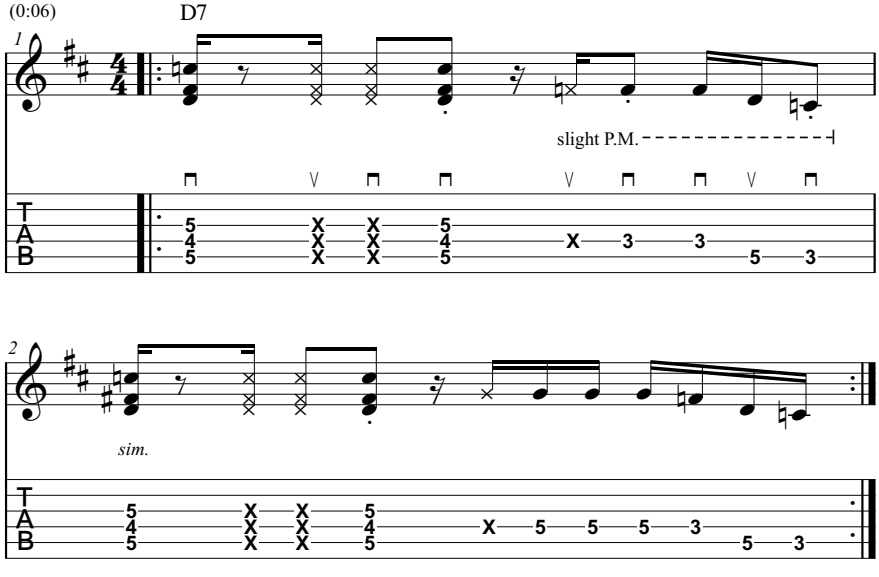
But later, in 2014, Feingold had what she calls "a falling out with the guitar." Feeling unhappy and lost while living in Los Angeles, she left her main gig in Badu's band after eight years for a quieter life in western Massachusetts' Berkshire mountains. For the next five years, she set guitar aside while making a living as a professional orchestrator and arranger for film and video games, including *Destiny* (a soundtrack of her orchestrations for the game will be released this summer).

As Feingold explains, her emotional turmoil stemmed from the fact that she had always known she was a trans woman, but "I didn't live like that because I didn't think the world would accept me." Toward the end of her five-year disconnect from guitar, she met Bruno Mars through a mutual friend, and he subsequently asked her to play on the Silk Sonic record. Despite not having played guitar for years, she couldn't say no to such an opportunity. Throughout the making of the album,

Ex. 3



Ex. 4



she transitioned, and both events contributed to the blossoming of her personal life as well as her relationship with her guitar.

"I studied a lot of different styles and guitar players, but I never really felt like I had a sound until I transitioned," she says."I feel like I just emerged through my instrument by simply being authentic."

Ex. 4 is another window into Feingold's expressive style, in which she enjoys seamlessly combining multiple guitar parts into one playable groove. Incorporating a bit more chicken scratching, she creates a chordal

rhythmic figure offset by a single-note riff. Note in bar 1 how she uses both deadened and staccato notes on beat 3, demonstrating just how essential these nuances are if you want to play funk guitar authentically.

Her time with Alford convinced Feingold that she wanted to fully understand the essence of how he played. At his recommendation, upon returning to Boston she joined a Black Pentecostal church, where she immersed herself in gospel music for a full year. There were no rehearsals or discussions about the songs with regard to key or form, and no one told her what the chord changes were. Unacquainted with gospel's rapid-fire chord changes, she had to quickly learn how to "get in where I fit in," she says. The experience strengthened her intuition. "I'm not going to hit every chord that they're playing," she explains, "so how do I get inside of this music and contribute something? Some of it was guide tones, sound effects, octaves. It taught me a lot about how to just listen and respond." At the same time, she was playing instrumental jazz/funk music at Boston clubs like Wally's Jazz Café. Once again, there were no rehearsals, and since there was usually no keyboard player present, she would play rhythm all night.

Feingold incorporates all sorts of ingenious techniques borrowed from different instruments, like the one she picked up from hearing the legendary bassist James Jamerson on classic Motown records, as shown in **Ex. 5**. As she explains in the corresponding video, the example uses open strings as passing tones, which are especially useful in flat keys, where they're often *non-diatonic* (out of key). Playing in the key of E♭ major here and with a swing-16ths feel, Feingold starts with a non-diatonic open A note hammered-on to the C♯ on the 4th fret. She then strikes a (diatonic) open D string, followed by a "hammer-on from nowhere" to the E♭ on the 5th string. If you replace the open D with the same pitch on the 5th string (5th fret), it would just be a rather conventional-sounding passage, but

Ex. 5

playing it like this lends the phrase a quirky charm. In this way, Feingold expresses her personality through her rhythm playing in much the same way lead guitar players do when soloing.

Another key element of Feingold's style is her uncanny ability to create different feels by playing either slightly "ahead of" or "behind" the beat (the latter is often referred to as playing "in the pocket"). When asked how to begin working on this, Feingold pointed to one of her posts explaining how the late Detroit record producer J Dilla would create a behind-the-beat feel with his drum programming. It's a worthwhile watch, so be sure to check out Feingold's video tutorial "How to Get J Dilla Hi-Hat Time Feel Into Your Playing" online at **guitarplayer.com/june24-lesson**, along with the audio and video files for this lesson.

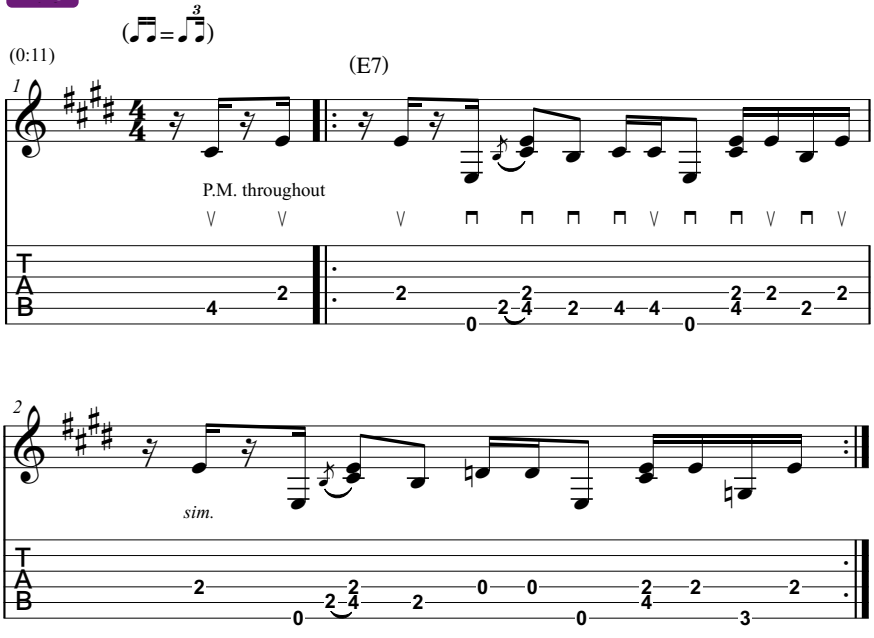
Ex. 6 is a nifty single-note riff Feingold uses to concretely convey how to lock into playing a classic J Dilla–style groove, here over D'Angelo's "Feel Like Makin' Love." Using the accompanying video, play along with her, feeling the time as she does. As the guitarist explains in the on-screen text, she plays the strong beats (1 and 3, where the kick drum hits) directly on the beat and everything in between a bit behind, which you can also think of as "late" or "lazy."

As Feingold's personal life flourished, her playing career was also rekindled. Using her arsenal of vintage gear, the

guitarist has since performed with a host of major artists, including Alicia Keys, Jay-Z, Common and the Roots. She is currently working on separate records with Charlie Hunter and Bootsy Collins, while also being known online as a respected teacher, with more than 30,000 followers. Like another of her heroes, Fred Rogers, creator of the classic children's TV series *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood*, Feingold strives to create an environment (via her Instagram and Patreon) where everyone can come and feel comfortable learning — in her case, how to funk things up.

Jeff Jacobson is a guitarist, songwriter and veteran guitar transcriber, with hundreds of published credits. For information on virtual guitar lessons and custom transcriptions, feel free to reach out to Jeff on Instagram @ jjmusicmentor or visit jeffjacobson.net.

Ex. 6



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Be Your Own Bassist

Going deep with the Boss Octave's Poly mode.

BY JIMMY LESLIE

I HAD MY mind blown watching Biréli Lagrène conjure a believable bass tone for lower notes along with a pure guitar tone for the higher register as he played what appeared to be straightforward stuff on the fretboard. How the hell was he doing that? I asked him in an interview for the January Frets feature, and his answer also blew my mind.

"I use a Boss OC-3 Super Octave pedal, on which they have this great trick called Poly mode," Lagrène told me. "You can set that so it only adds the lower octave effect to the lower notes you play on the fifth and sixth strings, while the top four remain free of the effect. It's miraculous for a player like myself who loves bass. It's been around for a while, but many guitar players are unaware that the Super Octave has this option. Suddenly it provides that dimension, and everything becomes bigger."

GET POLY AMOROUS

The OC-3 was the first octave pedal to feature Poly mode, which has been available on all subsequent Boss Octave pedals, including the latest, the OC-5, which I've been using. Vintage mode simulates the classic OC-2 and tracks far better for single notes, but it can't deal with more than one note. To enter Poly mode, flick the Vintage/Poly switch to the right. Octave tones can now be applied to multiple notes, even a chord.

HOW TO APPLY

To get the best results, make these tweaks. First, be sure the toggle switch on the back face is set to Guitar. Set the four control knobs across the top panel as follows: direct level at noon, +1 Oct hard left, and -1 Oct hard right. The control for -2 Oct/Range is the tricky part in Poly mode, as it adjusts the bandwidth of the -1 Oct effect. The knob's marker point sets the line of demarcation on a filter that leaves notes above the corresponding frequency pure while it adds lower octaves to those below. If you simply want to octave the lowest note in a chord, ping the knob far left. See the little line above the letter "L" that points up to a thicker, curved line covering about 5 to 4 o'clock on the dial? That's the moneymaker range for splitting your pure guitar tone from the octave bass.

I usually want notes on the sixth and fifth strings to be the bass. Sometimes I can get that just right, and sometimes I must compromise. Variables include the guitar's scale length, strings and pickup type, as well as the technique applied: plectrum or fingerstyle, straightforward or percussive. Sometimes the tracking seems better than others, but the tone is always huge and cool in some way.

THE BASS-ICS

The easiest thing to do is set range to lowest and strum a full barre, such as in the fifth position for a huge A chord. Next, try hybrid picking, either fingerstyle or with a pick. Pluck down on the root note while pulling up on the top strings with fingers. Move on to some different chords and positions. Experiment with different range settings and chords with a fifth-string root. Finally, try getting a simple bass pattern or walking line going while finger-plucking double- and triple-stops above. I love percussive slapping for bass, but you must be extra precise because the truer the strike of the note, the better the octave effect will track.

Your playing affects the effect, which in turn will affect your playing by making you think about the bass and guitar separately, which will help you develop part independence. Plus, it's just so great to make your own bass parts. Playing solo becomes a duo, and so on. Hip tip: Use the direct output to send the pure signal to a second amp while the main output becomes dedicated to the octave effect. The best part of being your own bassist is that you can play anything and everything without worrying about what the bass player is going to do. Because now the bass player is you.

Jimmy Leslie has been Frets editor since 2016. See many Guitar Player*– and Frets-related videos on his YouTube channel, and learn about his acoustic/electric rock group at spirithustler.com.*

KEELEY

Angry Orange, Blues Disorder, Muse Driver and Super Rodent

TESTED BY ART THOMPSON

The Angry Orange switches between a 1978 Boss DS-1 and a 1991 "Soviet" Big Muff, and lets you swap their drive and tone stacks.

YOU COULD BE excused for glazing over yet another batch of pedals trumpeting different flavors of grind, but these new boxes from Keeley have a cool twist in their ability to mix and match different drive and tone stacks, enhancing their sonic range and flexibility in the process.

The Angry Orange, Blues Disorder, Muse Driver and Super Rodent are each based around two distinctly different distortion circuits, but they share a control format consisting of three skirted metal knobs and a pair of two-position mini toggles that perform different functions, depending on the model. The knobs are fairly tall and have ribbed barrels that make them easy to grab if you need to make mid-song tweaks.

The wedge-shaped aluminum housings have front-mounted input, output and power jacks, and a press on/off mechanical foot switch that defaults to a buffered bypass but can be changed to true bypass by holding down the foot switch for a few seconds. This function proved handy for this review, as I could arrange the pedals on a board with the first one set for buffered bypass and the others in true bypass to avoid potential issues caused by stacking buffers in series. In addition, all pedals run at 9 to 18 volts, giving you the option of more volume and headroom at higher voltages if you need or desire them.

I tested these pedals with guitars from Fender, PRS and Knaggs and three combo amplifiers: a Fender Deluxe Reverb, a Fender '48 Dual Professional and a Vox AC15.

ANGRY ORANGE

What's so angry about a pedal that switches between a 1978 Boss DS-1 and a 1991 "Soviet" Big Muff, and lets you swap their drive and tone stacks? That's the premise of the Angry Orange, which can be configured to deliver classic DS-1 distortion by setting the left-hand tone switch and right-hand drive switches to the downward DS positions — or evoke a fuzzier Muff sound by putting both switches in their upward MF positions. Switching on the DS tone stack delivers a cool hybrid sound in which the distortion has loads of grimy fuzz character but is smoother and more rounded, thanks to the different EQ curve.

Alternatively, you can combine the Muff tone stack with the DS clipping circuit for a sound that has more presence and is tilted in a midrange-focused direction for a cool blend of fatness and cutting power. With the drive, tone and level knobs set, respectively, at around 10 o'clock, 2 o'clock and noon, the sounds were consistently good, and there was plenty of range on tap for heavier distortion and more output if I required them.

SPECIFICATIONS

CONTACT robertkeeley.com
PRICE $199

CONTROLS Drive, tone, level. Tone mini toggle: MF/DS. Drive mini toggle: MF (soft diode clipping)/DS (hard diode clipping)
I/O Input, output, 9–18VDC power jack
FOOT SWITCH Mechanical, buffered bypass (factory default) or user-activated true bypass
EXTRAS Can run on voltages ranging from 9 to 18VDC
SIZE 5" x 2.5" x 2" (LxWxH)
WEIGHT .78 lb
BUILT USA

KUDOS DS-1 and Big Muff circuits with expanded tonal range via the ability to swap drive and tone circuits
CONCERNS None

BLUES DISORDER

The Blues Disorder's BB and OC settings correspond to a '90s Marshall Bluesbreaker pedal — a pocket-sized rendition of the combo amp that Eric Clapton made famous — and a Fulltone OCD, which combines beautifully saturated playing feel with a clarity that always lets the character of the guitar stand out. Having both of these cool circuits in one box makes the Disorder a blast, and Keeley's rendition of the

The Muse Driver serves up Andy Timmons' silicon LED distortion and Robert Keeley's preferred germanium-transistor clipping.

Bluesbreaker is also quieter than the original, offering a little bonus.

The Blues Disorder is easy to love because the BB tones with both switches set upward are so dynamic and touch responsive that you could probably cut a gig playing it direct into the PA if push came to shove. On the other hand, the OC side with both switches down is an addictive distortion tone that can be laid on super thick while staying responsive to the guitar's volume and your picking attack, all without masking note detail or the character of the guitar and pickups.

Good as these circuits are on their own, it's cool to combine the BB drive circuit with the OC tone stack for a smoothly textured flavor of grind that punches out with ballsy, amp-sounding presence that's fun to deploy for lead and dirty rhythm just by riding the guitar volume. Turning things around and using the BB tone stack with the OC drive circuit is the bomb for distortion tones that carry a muscular presence — a presence that I found reminiscent of playing an OCD pedal through a non-master Marshall set for stout crunch. The Blues Disorder is a Swiss Army knife: You can do anything with it, and there's no wrong way to go with the switching options because they all sound killer.

The Blues Disorder's settings correspond to a '90s Marshall Bluesbreaker pedal and a Fulltone OCD.

SPECIFICATIONS

PRICE $199

CONTROLS Drive, tone, level. Tone mini toggle: BB (active midrange boost)/OS (HF filter). Drive mini toggle: BB (soft diode clipping)/OS (hard diode clipping)
I/O Input, output, 9–18VDC power jack
FOOT SWITCH Mechanical, buffered bypass (factory default) or true bypass
EXTRAS Can run on voltages ranging from 9 to 18VDC
SIZE 5" x 2.5" x 2" (LxWxH)
WEIGHT .78 lb
BUILT USA

KUDOS Bluesbreaker and OCD-style circuits with expanded tonal range via the ability to swap drive and tone circuits
CONCERNS None

The Super Rodent is based around circuits from the Pro Co Rat and the Boss SD-1 Super Overdrive.

MUSE DRIVER

This pedal goes off-road by focusing on individual players' tones, which are represented by the personalized switch settings: AT for Andy Timmons in the up positions and RK for Robert Keeley in the down settings. There's no explanation of what these circuits are based on other than the left switch toggles between high-pass and full-range, respectively, for the AT and RK positions, while the right switch activates silicon LED clipping on the AT side and germanium-transistor clipping on the RK position. As such, they're good-sounding overdrives. The AT settings deliver smooth, singing distortion due to the symmetrical clipping, and the result is a more Boogie-like presentation. The RK setting reduces edge and adds a bass boost at 100Hz to deliver heavier, thicker tone that's great for hard rock, metal and anything that requires crushing rhythm and lead tones.

These very distinct distortions would be even better if you could foot-switch between them. Even so, pairing the AT drive stack with the RK tone circuit delivers a girthy Boogie-meets-Marshall sound that's smooth and gutsy. Doing the opposite and using RK for drive toughens the OD sound, while the AT tone stack slims things down a bit for more cutting power. It proved to be a good setting for guitars with humbuckers.

SPECIFICATIONS

PRICE $199

CONTROLS Drive, tone, level. Tone mini toggle: AT (high pass)/RK (full range). Drive mini toggle: AT (silicon LED clipping)/RK (germanium diode clipping)
I/O Input, output, 9-18VDC power jack
FOOT SWITCH Mechanical, buffered bypass (factory default) or true bypass
EXTRAS Can run on voltages ranging from 9 to 18VDC
SIZE 5" x 2.5" x 2" (LxWxH)
WEIGHT .64 lb
BUILT USA

KUDOS Two signature distortion circuits with expanded tonal range via the ability to swap drive and tone circuits
CONCERNS None

SUPER RODENT

As the name suggests, the Super Rodent is based around Pro Co Rat and Boss SD-1 Super Overdrive circuits, and features SD and RT positions on its two mini toggles. With both switches set to the RT side there's a filter for tone and a hard-clipping drive stack, and the pedal goes right to saturated fuzz, where there's tons of gain available. The nicely tapered tone control affords sounds ranging from soft and buttery to bright and biting, but without becoming harsh or icepick-like.

The SD setting combines a mid-focus tone circuit with a soft-clip drive stack. The response is less gainy, even when drive is maxed, and it's a little thinner and more tubular sounding, all of which makes it excellent for organic overdrive tones, especially when the gain is turned down and the level is cranked in order to push the amplifier into distortion.

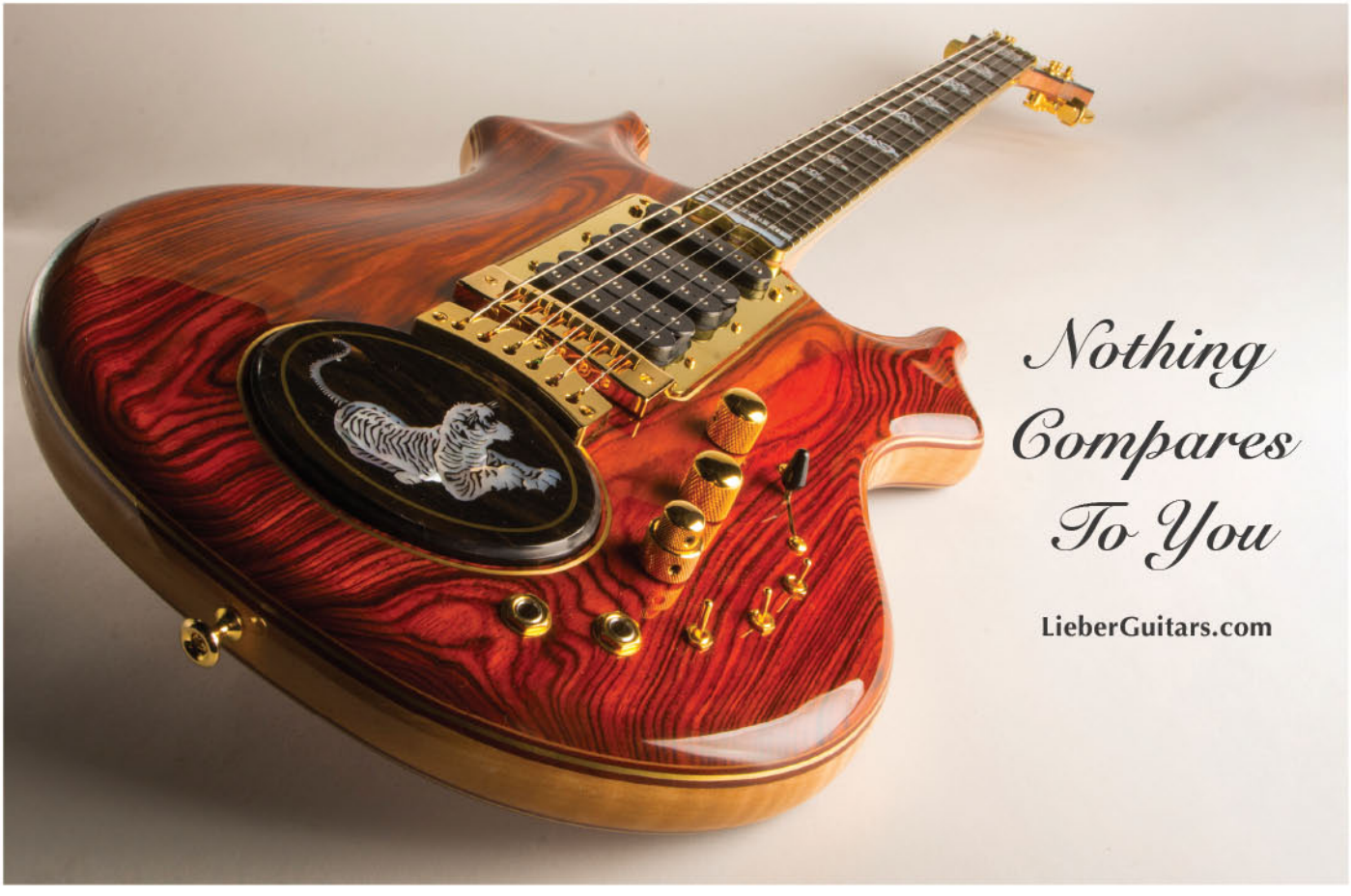
The Super Rodent's dynamic response and touch sensitivity are more natural and amp-like as well. However, by combining the RT drive stack with the SD tone circuit, the low-end blossomed so well that it quickly became a favorite setup with all the guitars and amps I tried it with. It all goes to show the Super Rodent's utility as a do-it-all distortion pedal that blurs the line between fuzz and distortion, while it offers the best aspects of both.

SPECIFICATIONS

PRICE $199

CONTROLS Drive, tone, level. Tone mini toggle: SD (mid focus)/RT (filter). Drive mini toggle: SD (soft diode clipping)/RT (hard diode clipping)
I/O Input, output, 9–18VDC power jack
FOOT SWITCH Mechanical, buffered bypass (factory default) or true bypass
EXTRAS Can run on voltages ranging from 9 to 18VDC
SIZE 5" x 2.5" x 2" (LxWxH)
WEIGHT .64 lb
BUILT USA

KUDOS Rat and SD-1 distortion sounds with expanded tonal range via the ability to swap drive and tone circuits
CONCERNS None



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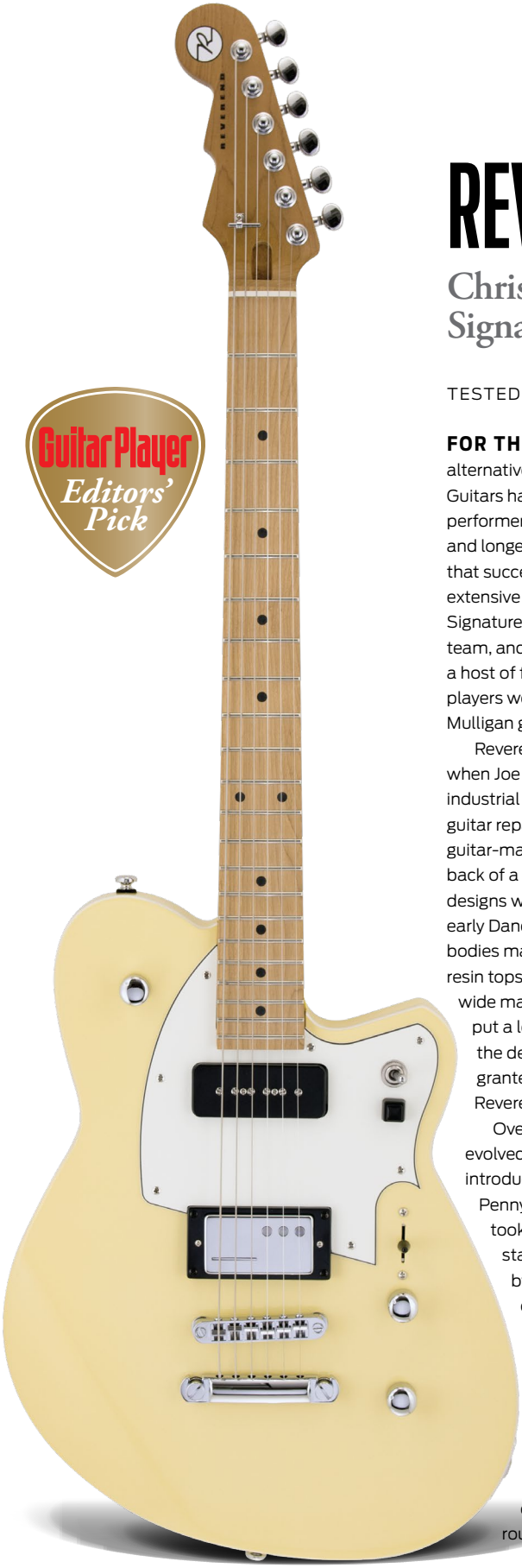


REVEREND

Chris Freeman Signature

TESTED BY DAVE HUNTER

FOR THE SCRAPPY American-alternative upstart it once was, Reverend Guitars has grown to be an impressive performer in a market crowded with bigger and longer-established names, and part of that success is found in its compiling of an extensive artist roster. The Chris Freeman Signature is the latest model to join that team, and as with so many before, it brings a host of features designed to appeal to players well beyond the fan base of the Hot Mulligan guitarist.

Reverend Guitars was launched in 1997 when Joe Naylor combined his studies of industrial design, lutherie school and vintage guitar repair experience into a viable guitar-making business in a garage at the back of a Detroit bicycle shop. His early designs were notable for their clear nod to early Danelectro guitars, using semihollow bodies made with wood-based phenolic-resin tops and backs, which were attached to wide mahogany center blocks. Naylor also put a lot more thought and attention into the design and build process, and was granted a patent for his design of the Reverend High Resonance Body.

Over the coming years, the business evolved: Offshore manufacture was introduced in 2006, and in 2010 Ken and Penny Haas purchased the company and took over management, while Naylor stayed on for R&D. This was followed by a move to Toledo, Ohio. Over the ensuing years, the core Reverend designs evolved away from the Danelectro-inspired template and into something closer to the guitar we have here this issue.

The Chris Freeman Signature springs from the blueprint for the Double Agent OG. It has an offset-waist body shape with a rounded upper horn and a sharply truncated lower cutaway, and is finished in your choice of Turquoise Sparkle or Powder Yellow. The body is made from solid korina, a tonewood somewhat akin to mahogany, but with its own characteristic upper-midrange bite. To this, Freeman has spec'd a bolt-on neck and separate fingerboard, both made from roasted maple, an upside-down headstock with Reverend Pin-Lock tuners, an inspiringly mixed pair of pickups and a few other surprises, all brought together in a collaboration that he clearly enjoyed.

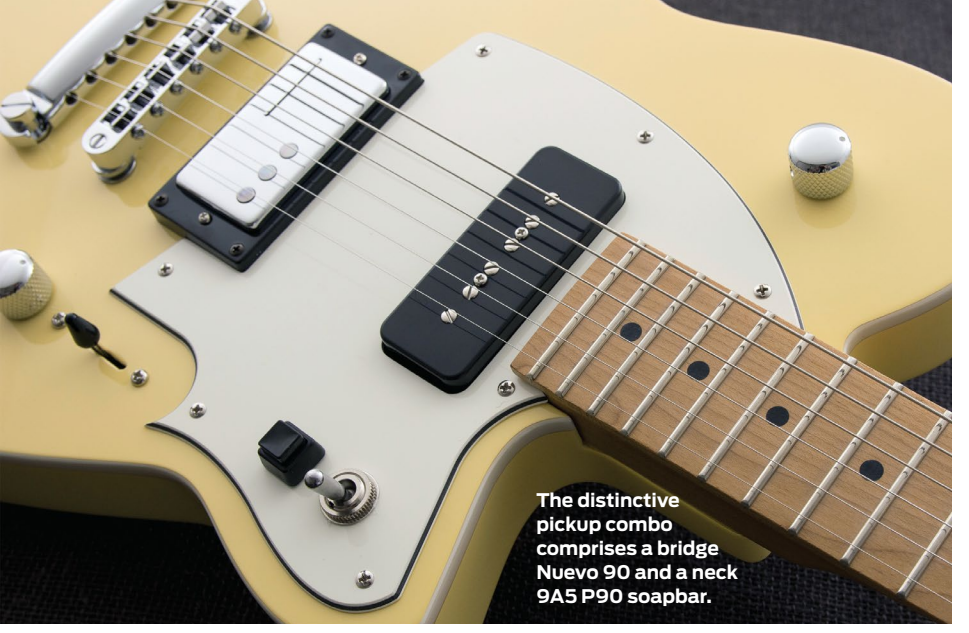
"The process for putting the guitar together with Reverend was really easygoing for both parties," the guitarist tells *Guitar Player*. "We've been like family for years, and I text Ken [*Haas*] pretty often. Before they asked if I'd be interested in doing a signature model, I'd already been playing the pickup configuration we used for it for a couple of years after swapping out the humbucker in the Double Agent OG for the Nuevo 90. I did that because the first Reverend I played was the Buckshot and I was missing the single-coil in the bridge.

SPECIFICATIONS

Chris Freeman Signature
CONTACT reverendguitars.com
PRICE $1,439 street

NUT Boneite (synthetic bone), 1 11/16" wide
NECK Roasted maple
FRETBOARD Roasted maple, 25.5" scale, 12" radius
FRETS 22 medium-jumbo
TUNERS Reverend Pin-Lock
BODY Solid korina
BRIDGE Tune-o-matic with stoptail
PICKUPS Reverend Nuevo 90 bridge, 9A5 neck
CONTROLS Master volume and tone, Bass Contour, three-way switch, momentary and latching kill switches
FACTORY STRINGS D'Addario .010–.046
WEIGHT 7.8 lbs
BUILT IN Korea

KUDOS A well-built, great-playing, and sonically versatile workhorse of a guitar with a bundle of interesting features
CONCERNS The reverse headstock might take some getting used to



The distinctive pickup combo comprises a bridge Nuevo 90 and a neck 9A5 P90 soapbar.

"The finishes were exciting to see in the mock-ups they sent over, but seeing the colors in person blew me away. I like the Turquoise Sparkle more than I thought I could. I was surprised by how big the sparkle is!"

In addition to the bridge-position Nuevo 90 — a pickup that blends Reverend's original Railhammer design with elements of a humbucker-sized P90 in a noise-canceling single-coil design — the neck position carries the maker's 9A5, a more traditional vintage-voiced P90 soapbar pickup. It's a pairing that Freeman evolved toward through years of hard touring, rather than merely by chance.

"I was being steered toward this setup for a couple years," he explains. "I loved the single-coil in the bridge position of my first Reverend, the Buckshot, but I use the neck pickup or both pickups often for Hot Mulligan's cleaner emo sounds and wanted to spring for a P90 in the neck.

"I played the Double Agent for a while, but I missed how the single-coil sounded versus the humbucker. But sometimes we play on really noisy stages, so I decided to go with the Nuevo 90 in the bridge to bring back some of that single-coil sound and reduce hum. And ever since then, it's been great. I don't know if any of the other models have that pickup configuration."

What pulls them together is a creative and unusual control section that marries traditional master volume and tone controls and a three-way switch on the lower-treble bout with Reverend's Bass Contour control on the upper-bass bout, as well as two types of kill switches — a momentary push button and a latching toggle — on the cutaway horn. The latter are useful accessories in Freeman's distinctive playing, but even the way in which it was all mounted resulted from the artist's input.

"The rear-mounted controls are really the only thing I think some players might not think about at first glance," Freeman says. "I'm a road dog, playing over 100 shows a year. I kept sweating into the controls during our longer sets or during outdoor summer festivals. Sometimes by the end of the set my guitars just sounded underwater and would stop working until they dried out the next day. They never felt the same; all the sweat was getting into that front control plate. As a result, we put the plate on the back so it can keep up with me on the road and not lose sound."

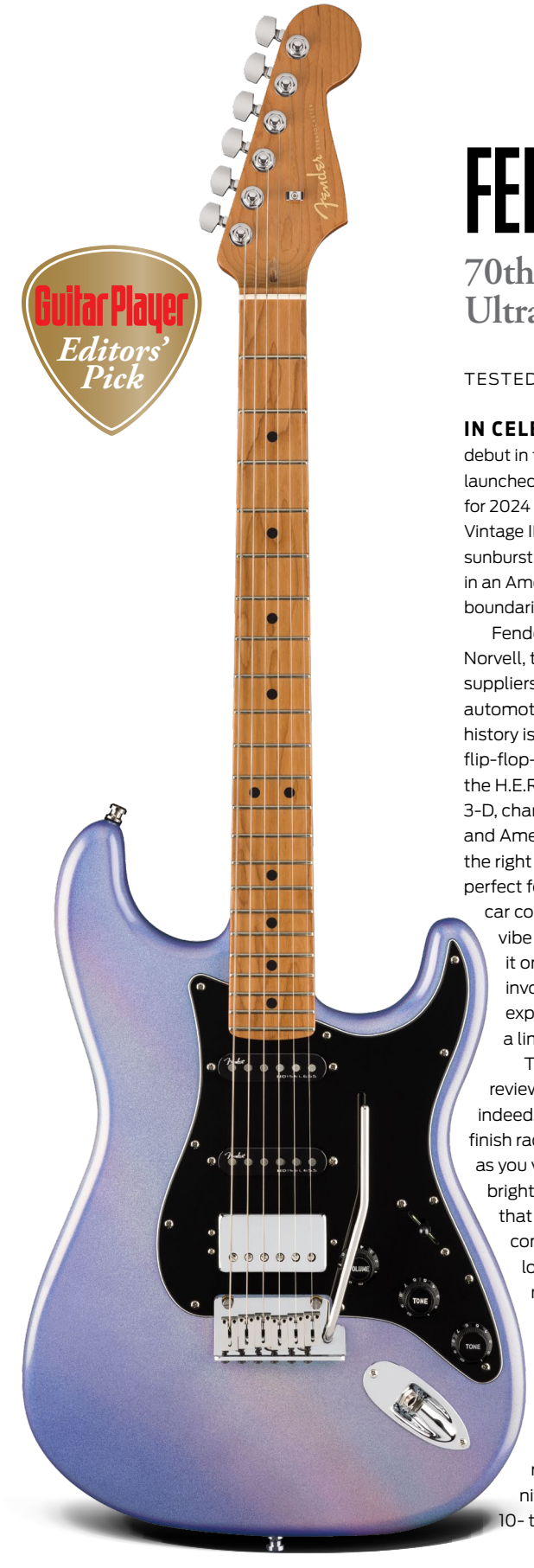
THIS WAS MY FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH THE NUEVO 90, AND I DUG IT IMMEDIATELY

The Chris Freeman Signature feels great in the hand, with a familiarly comfortable Reverend neck carve and smoothly dressed frets, but that interesting twist in the control layout allows you to easily access fun alternative sounds. Testing it through a Fender Deluxe Reverb combo, a 65amps London head and 2x12 cab, and a Fractal FM9 modeler into headphones, I quickly found it an inspiring instrument that sent me in some unexpected directions.

Reverend's take on the P90 in the neck position offers few surprises, but it delivers a very capable performance for clean tones that are rich and warm, with just a little grit to thicken the brew, as well as the throaty growl in overdriven settings that has won so many soapbar fans over the years. This was my first encounter with the Nuevo 90, however, and I dug it immediately. Blending slug-pole clarity and blade-pole beef between the plain and wound strings, respectively, it somehow still sounds like all six strings are firing through the same pickup, and delivers a great marriage of clarity and depth in the process.

Take note that this position is not intended only for emo fans, I found it was fantastic for meaty twang and girthy chime alike, and when applying some gain Reverend's clever Bass Contour circuit dialed it between Tele and PAF-like tones, all noise-canceling for worry-free lead work. These two outwardly different pickups also played great together in the middle position, issuing a rounded, slightly scooped voice with a lot of sparkle that worked well for a range of rhythm needs. Ultimately, the guitar felt entirely at home in everything from indie to alt-rock to shoegaze, but it also applied itself effortlessly to alt-country, blues, punk and some heavier rock riffing.

I've appreciated Reverend's ability to deliver big-league performance at semi-pro prices for many years — heck, even a couple of decades now — but the Chris Freeman Signature model offers up some hefty surprises nonetheless, and earns an Editors' Pick Award in the process.



Guitar Player Editors' Pick

FENDER

70th Anniversary Ultra Stratocaster HSS

TESTED BY ART THOMPSON

Sealed locking tuners and a 70th anniversary Quadra Tap humbucker are part of the Ultra Strat HSS package.

IN CELEBRATION OF the Stratocaster's debut in the spring of 1954, Fender has launched a series of 70th Anniversary models for 2024 that range from the American Vintage II 1954 Stratocaster in two-color sunburst to the latest Ultra Stratocaster HSS, in an Amethyst finish that pushes the boundaries of automotive technologies.

Fender's EVP of product design, Justin Norvell, tells us, "We reached out to paint suppliers to see what's happening in the automotive space, because part of Fender's history is car colors. We've been playing with flip-flop-type colors, like Chrome Glow on the H.E.R model — one of the first of the 3-D, chameleon-like colors we've done — and Amethyst, which we've been holding for the right guitar. The Ultra turned out to be perfect for it. Amethyst looks like a sports-car color and goes with the contemporary vibe this guitar symbolizes. We offer it only in Amethyst because it's very involved to do and the paint is expensive, but it's cool to do it in a limited capacity."

The Ultra Stratocaster HSS on review here is an attention grabber indeed. Its pearly iridescent Amethyst finish radiates blue, orange and green hues as you view the sculpted alder body in bright light — or practically any light, for that matter. With its enhanced contours, the glossy body presents a lovely contrast to the roasted maple neck, which wears a hand-rubbed oil-urethane finish on the back, and features a hand-filling Modern D profile. Adding to the complexity of the build — and for reasons that are specifically for player comfort and feel — the fingerboard has rolled edges, is finished in satin nitrocellulose-lacquer, and has a 10- to 14-inch radius and 22 medium-jumbo frets with polished crowns and smoothly beveled ends. In concert with a tapered heel that provides easy access to the high positions, the playability of this guitar sums up as "sleek and fast."

Strings load through the inertia block of the two-point vibrato, which has chunky steel saddles and a push-in stainless-steel bar, and is adjusted to float, as per the factory setup. The bending feel is silky, and the chrome-plated unit returns to pitch very well, facilitated by a set of sealed locking tuners and a carefully worked bone nut that doesn't create string-pinging when you abuse the bar.

In the electronics department, the Ultra's complement of 70th Anniversary pickups consists of a pair of noiseless single-coils in the neck and middle slots, and a new Quadra Tap humbucker in the bridge position. Norvell explains it's all about evolving a platform that has never stopped evolving. "The Quadra Tap pickup is one of the most intense things we've done. When people say 'tap,' a lot of times they mean coil-split. A regular humbucker has less winds on it than a single-coil. So in our Double Tap pickup, for

The Amethyst finish radiates blue, orange and green hues as you view the sculpted alder body in bright light.

example, one of the coils is overwound, but it's reduced, or tapped, in its humbucker mode. So when you split the coils, it would 'un-tap' to be a full single-coil. The Quadra Tap does that, too, but with both of the coils, so now you've got more sonic options."

The five-way blade switch selects the pickups in the standard fashion — the three individually and the neck/middle and middle/bridge combinations. A volume control and dual tone knobs (one for the neck and middle pickups, and one for the humbucker) complete the lineup. However, the Ultra's range of sounds is enhanced by virtue of the first two controls having push-on/off S-1 switches invisibly embedded into their tops. These sly switches activate, respectively, a coil-split and a "hot voicing" for the Quadra Tap, which, in the latter, means both coils are now untapped and engaged at their highest output. And it's all done passively.

Both of these S-1 functions proved useful, as the coil-split brings out the chime and sparkle in the middle/bridge combo, while the hot voicing unchains the bridge pickup to be louder and fatter, which is great in full 'bucker mode for fat, sustaining distortion tones or when running in coil-split for ripping single-coil lead and dirty-rhythm sounds.

The Ultra Stratocaster offers a ton of great tones and presents handy options that become obvious when you dig into the switching choices and see where they lead you on the inspirational curve. Whether your stylistic tastes lean toward Jimi Hendrix, Eddie Van Halen or Stevie Ray Vaughan for rock and blues, or you're into channeling the funky soul of Nile Rogers or shredding with the atmospheric awesomeness of Eric Johnson, you'll find the 70th Anniversary Ultra Stratocaster a mesmerizingly cool guitar, as well as a tribute to the genius of Leo Fender for creating an instrument that can be re-imagined to suit players needs.

As Norvell puts it, "It's not just asking, 'How do we replicate stuff from the 1950s,' but rather, 'How do we continue to evolve a guitar that's never stopped evolving since 1954?' The idea with all these limited editions is not just to make a 70th Anniversary Stratocaster that celebrates the past; it's also about showing where we're headed for the future."

SPECIFICATIONS

70th Anniversary Ultra Stratocaster HSS
CONTACT fender.com
PRICE $2,499

NUT Bone, 1.685" wide
NECK Roasted maple bolt-on, Modern D shape
FRETBOARD Maple, 25.5" scale 10"–14" compound radius
FRETS 22 medium jumbo
TUNERS Sealed locking
BODY Alder
BRIDGE Ultra 2-point Tremolo
PICKUPS 70th Anniversary noiseless Ultra Strat single-coils (neck and middle), 70th-anniversary Quadra Tap humbucker (bridge)
CONTROLS Master volume, dual tone controls, five-way switch. S-1 switches on tone knobs for activating coil-split and hot voicing sounds
EXTRAS Nitrocellulose lacquer finish. Black tweed case. Iridescent Amethyst gloss finish
FACTORY STRINGS Fender .010–.046
WEIGHT 8.18 lbs (as tested)
BUILT USA

KUDOS Noiseless single-coil and fat humbucker tones, plus S-1 switching options to maximize the Quadra Tap pickup's potential
CONCERNS None

MACKIE

ShowBox All-in-One Performance Rig

TESTED BY JIMMY LESLIE

THE ALL-IN-ONE busker box has become a subgenre in the live sound arena. Mackie makes a range of them, and the new ShowBox takes the concept to the next level. The idea is a bona fide Swiss Army knife that works as everything from a guitar amp to an ensemble PA, with the option of cutting the cord and running guerrilla-style, on battery power. The star of the ShowBox is an ingenious breakaway six-channel mixer. Its feature set includes multiple effects with snapshot recall, amp models, an overdrive, a compressor, a tuner, a looper, Bluetooth and even onboard recording. ShowBox promises a lot. Can it really be all that?

It's tempting to say "yes." To begin with, the breakaway mixer control is awesome, giving a player total control over the mix right at the mic stand. iOS apps are fine in this regard, and Mackie's other battery-powered boxes have them, but they require a reliable Bluetooth connection to a phone or tablet, which is often needed for other stuff. The ShowBox controller is also light and designed specifically with the guitar-playing busker in mind. It can be affixed to practically any stand using the included hardware and the Ethernet cable that provides a powered link to the main unit.

Despite having six channels, ShowBox has four primary channels for mics and guitars, with channel 5/6 provided as an auxiliary/Bluetooth line that offers no processing other than EQ. The inputs on the back of the main unit dictate your setup: Channels one and three have XLR jacks, while two and four have ¼-inch guitar inputs.

The digital mixer's controls are intuitive, considering that the rather busy-looking interface has a footprint about the size of a grown-man's hand. The eight knobs on the panel's left are also push buttons to select functions, including volume, gain, EQ and effects, and they light up different colors to help you navigate. Push the FX1 knob down and you're in Tuner mode, which works well and is handy as hell. In Effects mode, the effect names are displayed in a box above the FX1 and FX2 knobs; twist each to choose

SPECIFICATIONS

Mackie ShowBox
CONTACT mackie.com
PRICE $799 street

CHANNELS 6 (2 mic & 2 guitar with full signal processing; 2 aux/Bluetooth with volume & EQ only)
CONNECTIVITY Ch1 XLR, Ch2 ¼", Ch3 XLR, Ch4 ¼", Ch5/6 ¼" line in/Bluetooth; EXT FX ¼" send & return; ⅛" aux in, ¼" footswitch looper/FX mute, ¼" phones out, XLR mix out, remote Ethernet out, USB-C in, microSD slot for recording
BUTTONS (On main unit) Front LED, feedback eliminator, outdoor mode, P.A. mode, Bluetooth pairing, power on/off
MIXER CONTROLS Channel select 1–5/6, channel volume/gain/mute; EQ low, mid, high; FX1 select/level/tuner, FX2 select/level/snapshot, compressor, FX loop, master volume & mute, headphone level, looper start/stop, loop level, SD record on/off
EXTRAS Ethernet cord to breakaway mixer and stand attachment hardware
POWER 400 watts peak class D, 122 dB max SPL. Operates on A/C power or rechargeable lithium-ion battery up to 12 hours
SPEAKERS 8" woofer, 1" titanium high-frequency driver
DIMENSIONS 19.7" x 11.8" x 9.8" (HxWxD)
WEIGHT 20.9 lbs
BUILT China

KUDOS Ingenious breakaway mixer provides handy intuitive control of fabulous feature set. Fantastic flexibility, connectivity, portability
CONCERNS Long-term durability, lack of phantom mic power, and limited headroom and power

effects ranging from modulation and ambience to amp modeling and even reverse delay. You can create snapshots of your favorite combinations for quick recall and patch your favorite pedals into the main unit and control their overall level via the mixer's FX Loop. The onboard effects sound good when used in moderation.

A button on the main unit toggles between P.A. mode — which offers a broad, full-range sound — and Amp mode, which is more mids focused. Players will appreciate the abundance of guitar-centric effects here, which include fuzz, crunch and overdrive, as well as tube amp and acoustic ambience models that add a mic-like spatial quality. It also adds a hint of compression and gain, so be careful, particularly if you play percussively, because a hard slap will make the built-in limiter pop.

The acoustic ambience settings work for clean electric too. I tried them with a Strat, and while I didn't love the high-gain stuff (no surprise), the tube amp model was quite nice and was the only effect that sounds best when cranked up. And although I wouldn't likely use the ShowBox as an electric amp on its own, I wouldn't entirely count it out, given the unit's convenience for performing in a park or the backyard.

The right side of the mixer has a global volume control with a handy mute, a button to engage an onboard looper and a knob for level. The back of the Box has a ¼-inch jack for your remote foot switch. Hit the SD Record button and ShowBox will record your performance to a microSD card.

I tested the ShowBox mainly with a Martin GPCE Inception Maple and a carbon Klos Grand Mini Cutaway. The sound was good, and the tone was very sculptable. Mids and highs liven up with a bit of EQ, and the bass is most impressive, given ShowBox's eight-inch woofer and light weight — just 20 pounds. I got nice results using a Martin DJR-10E acoustic bass guitar.

However, players need to be careful not to crowd the Box, as the woofer will break up at volume if you do. While I wish there were more headroom and pure punchy power, what's there is on par for its class. A lightweight compact enclosure that can run on battery juice for up to 12 hours can't compare to the kind of heavy-duty, old-school Mackie that helped put the powered speaker on the map.

With that said, the ShowBox is powerful enough to fill a small space, such as a room, sidewalk corner or a backyard. For larger spaces or more than two performers, you can link a pair together for use as a set of mains or a main-plus-monitor configuration. On that last note, the monitor's side angle should be steeper for better projection from the floor. I wound up sticking a stuffed animal underneath to prop it up.

THE MACKIE SHOWBOX PACKS MORE GOODNESS INTO A PORTABLE PACKAGE THAN ANYTHING I'VE TRIED YET

Ultimately, though, the Mackie ShowBox packs more goodness into a portable package than anything I've tried yet. It's wonderful to have the mixer at your fingertips for everything from volume control to muting channels, and it sure beats walking over to the speaker box with your instrument on and flipping through controls in plain view of the audience. If you're seeking a lightweight all-in-one busker box with loads of features and conveniences, the ShowBox is worth a look.

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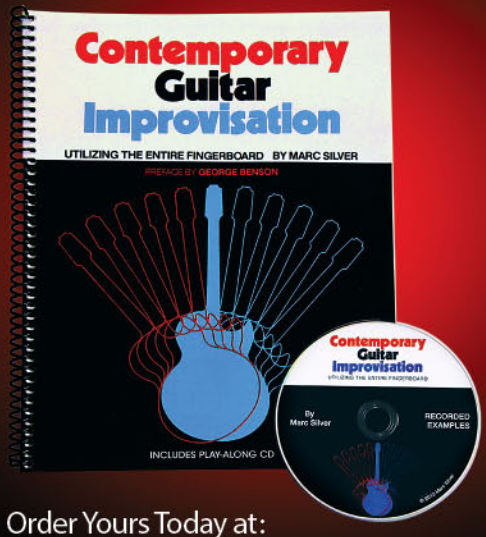

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Squeeze take their press shot literally. Chris Difford (left) and Glenn Tilbrook (right).

How I Wrote...

"Pulling Mussels (From the Shell)"

"White Punks on Dope"? **Glenn Tilbrook** reveals the unlikely history behind Squeeze's 1980 U.S. breakthrough.

BY JOE BOSSO

AS POP-ROCK MASTERPIECES go, it's hard to top Squeeze's "Pulling Mussels (From the Shell)." With its airtight hooks, wicked musicianship and highly literate lyrics, the first single from the band's 1980 third album, *Argybargy*, played a key role in breaking Squeeze in the States, and over the years it's become one of their most popular songs.

"'Pulling Mussels' definitely helped us throughout the U.S.," says lead guitarist and singer Glenn Tilbrook. "What's funny is, the song did okay on the charts. It wasn't a huge hit, but it's grown in stature over the years. That's the story with a lot of our songs."

UNDER THE INFLUENCE

Like Elton John and Bernie Taupin, the Squeeze songwriting team had a system: Rhythm guitarist and singer Chris Difford wrote the lyrics, and Tilbrook set them to music. "We rarely discussed lyrics," Tilbrook says. "Chris would hand me what he had, and off I went. Fortunately for me, he made my job quite easy. The lyrics for 'Pulling Mussels' were tremendously inspirational, so I started in a good place."

Responding to Difford's vivid vignettes about staying at a British budget holiday camp, Tilbrook strummed an acoustic guitar and came up with chords and melodies. "I was a fast writer back then, and this one came quickly," he recalls. "Also, there was a little bit of weed involved, which explains why the tempo was much slower on my demo."

Tilbrook adds that he was also under the spell of another, more unlikely influence. "We'd spent the better part of '79 opening for the Tubes, and their style rubbed off on me," he says. "The end part of the chorus has an unusual turnaround, and that's the culmination of hearing 'White Punks on Dope,' which is quite grandiose. The Tubes didn't play the sort of rock that we would do, but their approach sunk in subconsciously."

With the tune sketched out, Tilbrook made a vocal demo on his Teac four-track, using keyboards, a Minimoog for bass and a drum machine — but no guitar. "I figured I'd learn my parts later," he says. "Pulling Mussels" was one of 30 songs he gave the band for consideration. "I used to write twice as much as we needed because I wrote twice as much rubbish."

A MOMENT OF "PURE JOY"

Squeeze didn't rehearse the song before convening at London's Sound Techniques studio. Says Tilbrook, "There was no need. We were very strong and had a real focus. Our style was to get in the studio and work things out, which we could do very efficiently."

> **"I REALIZED I COULD JUST PLAY AN E NOTE OVER AND OVER AND IT WORKED ON TOP OF ALL THE CHORDS"**

Argybargy marked Squeeze's second go-round with producer John Wood, known for his work with Pink Floyd, Fairport Convention and Cat Stevens, among others. "John was a wonderful guiding spirit who had a knack for suggesting things that you would think were your ideas," Tilbrook says. Wood's stealthy manner paid off when it came time for Tilbrook to record a guitar solo for "Pulling Mussels." "I hadn't planned anything, which was the opposite of what I usually did," the guitarist says. "But John told me how Amos Garrett would drop in solos and stitch them together phrase by phrase. A light bulb went on over my head."

With the basic track completed, Tilbrook borrowed a friend's Gibson SG ("the first time I didn't use a Strat") and constructed the first half of the solo, punctuated with legato bends, but he was stuck for a second half. "Then I realized I could just play an E note over and over and it worked on top of all the chords," he says. "I didn't have to do anything complicated. It was a moment of pure joy."

THE WALKMAN TEST

Mixing sessions ran right up to the start of an Australian tour, leaving the band no time to assess what they'd done until they boarded their plane. "We had just gotten our cassettes, and we sat down to listen on our brand-new Walkmans," Tilbrook says. "It was such a relief – you sit there going, 'Fucking hell, this is really good!' When 'Pulling Mussels' came up, I thought, Yeah... This is pretty special."

The song quickly became a staple of Squeeze's live shows. "Fans always loved hearing it," Tilbrook says. "It does something special to audiences, which is wonderful. That works for us, as well." ▶

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